

INSPECTION REPORT

CHURCHILL COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Churchill, Winscombe

LEA area: North Somerset

Unique reference number: 109312

Headteacher: Dr Barry Wratten

Reporting inspector: Mrs D Wheatley
3538

Dates of inspection: 25th February – 1st March 2002

Inspection number: 191663

Short inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 – 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr M Williamson
Date of previous inspection:	3 rd February 1997

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11481	Laura Lindsay-Clift	Team inspector	Biology	
4344	Tom Ferris	Team inspector	French	How high are standards – the school's results and students' achievements – students' attitudes, values and personal development? How well are students taught? How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students? How well is the school led and managed?
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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6 - 13
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	15 - 19
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	19 - 21
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	21
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	23 - 27
PART D: THE SIXTH FORM	
RESULTS AND STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS	28 - 29
STUDENTS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	29
TEACHING AND LEARNING	30 - 31
CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS	31 - 32
THE SCHOOL'S CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS	32 - 33
PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS	33
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SIXTH FORM	33 - 34
PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	35 - 59

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Churchill Community School is an 11 – 18 rural comprehensive school for boys and girls situated in the village of Churchill in North Somerset. The roll has been increasing steadily for several years and the school, at 1697 on roll including the Sixth Form, is much larger than average. It serves a mainly rural population and has a good reputation in the local community. A high proportion of pupils travel in by bus. The school provides for the full ability range although the socio-economic profile of pupils is advantaged. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and none, currently, is at an early stage in learning English. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below the national average overall although the percentage with statements of special need is broadly average. The main needs supported are moderate learning difficulties, dyslexia and emotional and behavioural problems. The National Curriculum tests carried out in primary schools and other test information indicate that the attainment of pupils when they enter the school is above average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school provides a good education for its pupils. The well above average standards overall at GCSE and in the Sixth Form confirm the good progress made by the pupils. They are the result of focused teaching which is well tuned to examination requirements and the efforts of pupils who are very well motivated and keen to achieve. The leadership and management are good. The governors and new headteacher have clear and effective plans to develop the school further. Overall, the school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- Well above average GCSE results and good achievement as a result of effective teaching.
- Good teaching also leads to well above average standards and good achievement in the Sixth Form.
- The pupils' positive attitudes and motivation.
- Strong extra-curricular provision, particularly in music and sport.
- The quality of care and guidance in the Sixth Form.

What could be improved

- The below average standards in art at GCSE and A-level and the very poor accommodation in art.
- The use of performance data to promote pupils' progress at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form.
- The inconsistency of homework at Key Stage 3.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in February 1997. Overall, progress since then has been satisfactory. The well above average standards and good achievement at Key Stage 4 (Years 10 and 11) and in the Sixth Form have been maintained. The health and safety issues identified in the report have been dealt with effectively and the procedures for addressing health and safety issues have been overhauled, although a few items remain to be tackled. The personal care of pupils is good. Some identified inefficiencies in class sizes, central administration and pastoral support have been addressed appropriately. There is a need for

some further thought about the use of tutor time in the main school, the effectiveness of which varies considerably. A process for monitoring pupils' academic progress and providing targets for learning has been put in place and is making a good impact on attainment at GCSE. This has not, however, been extended to Years 7, 8 and 9 (Key Stage 3) or the Sixth Form and there is inconsistency between subjects in how effectively pupils' progress is monitored at these key stages. The governors and senior managers have grappled with serious deficiencies in the accommodation in the intervening years and have achieved marked improvements in some areas, including the provision of new buildings and refurbishment of existing accommodation. Nonetheless, insufficient progress has been made to improve the accommodation for art, which is very poor and has a negative impact on learning. Furthermore, several areas still require painting and refurbishment to provide an attractive learning environment and the quality of cleaning, which was an issue at the time of the last inspection, has not improved sufficiently.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 11 and Sixth Form students at the end of Year 13 based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A
A-levels/AS-levels	A	B	A	

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Overall results at A-level were well above average in 2001. The strongest subjects were biology, chemistry, physics, English language, sociology and GNVQ leisure and recreation where the results in 2001 were well above average. Above average results were attained in business (A-level and GNVQ), general studies and mathematics. The results were below average in French, geography and history, and well below in art and design. Compared to their GCSE performance two years earlier, achievement in the Sixth Form is good overall; for gifted students it is very good.

The school has maintained well above average standards at GCSE for the last three years. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good. It exceeded its average point score target in 2001. Its trend in results is rising in line with the national trend. Both boys' and girls' results are very good, with boys achieving slightly better than boys nationally. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well. Standards in music are high, with a much higher than average proportion of A*/A grades achieved in 2001. Well above average results were attained in 2001 in design and technology, economics, science, English literature, German, Spanish and physical education. Results in art and design, however, were well below average.

In the national tests for 14 year olds, the results were above average in English and mathematics and well above in science in the last two years. When compared to schools with a similar proportion of free school meals, the results in 2001 show English to be below average, mathematics in line with the average and science above. The inspection found achievement in Years 7 to 9 to be satisfactory in English and mathematics, and good in science.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are enthusiastic, well motivated and keen to learn.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good overall. Very good in Years 10 and 11 and the Sixth Form where pupils are business-like in wishing to achieve well. In Years 7 to 9, a small minority of pupils misbehave at times and distract others.
Personal development and relationships	Personal development is good. It is very good in the Sixth Form. Pupils throughout the school are pleasant and responsive to others' needs. Relationships are very good.
Attendance	Broadly average. Unauthorised absence is below average.

The pupils' very good attitudes contribute to the positive school climate. Warm relationships and good humour characterise most interactions and contribute to the good learning.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory	Good	Good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

The teaching is good overall. Very good subject knowledge and work well keyed to examination requirements characterise the strongest teaching which is to be found in Years 10 and 11 and in the Sixth Form. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' commitment and response. In the most effective teaching at in Years 10 and 11, for instance, they push pupils to exercise precision and accuracy in tackling questions both orally and in writing. In the Sixth Form, teachers demonstrate an enthusiasm for their subject, which has a positive impact on students' motivation and their willingness to extend themselves intellectually. There are weaknesses in the teaching of art and design and history in the Sixth Form. Particular strengths in pupils' learning include their acquisition of required specialist vocabulary, their ability to analyse and articulate increasingly complex ideas throughout Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form and their confidence in presenting to an audience of their peers.

In Years 7 to 9 the teaching is satisfactory overall. Occasionally, lessons in these years do not provide sufficient challenge for all pupils, and monitoring of progress is not consistent enough. The planning for the National Literacy Strategy at Key Stage 3 is very good and the teaching of the progress units of the strategy to under-performing Year 7 pupils is good. The teaching of numeracy is satisfactory.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The breadth and quality of the curriculum is good in the main school and there is very good Advanced Level provision in the Sixth Form. Extra-curricular provision, particularly in music and sport, is strong. Weaknesses are in the inadequate information and communication technology (ICT) provision for the current Year 11 (this has been addressed for Year 10) and in the range of vocational courses at non-advanced level in the Sixth Form
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good planning for pupils with special educational needs by the special educational needs co-ordinator and her team. The support for these pupils is good.
Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Good provision overall for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Very good provision in religious education. More opportunities could be provided for pupils in the main school to exercise formal responsibility.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school has very thorough arrangements for child protection. The monitoring of behaviour is good; that of attendance is satisfactory. Very good care and guidance in the Sixth Form.

Courses extra to the National Curriculum are provided at both key stages. The mainstream curriculum is considerably enriched by the wide extra-curricular programme, which includes educational visits and strong music and sport. The very wide Advanced Level provision in the Sixth Form is a significant attraction to parents and students in the local area. Statutory requirements are fulfilled except in the provision of ICT for the current Year 11 pupils, who have not had sufficient opportunity to develop their skills. The situation has been remedied with the provision of a discrete course for the current Year 10, which will be continued in the future. The pastoral care of pupils is good. Monitoring of pupils' academic progress is good at Key Stage 4. It needs to be further developed at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good overall. There is a new headteacher (January 2002) who has a clear vision for the school. The deputy heads and staff with management responsibilities are effective. The school has Investors in People status and has recently made a successful bid to become a Specialist Arts College.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are well informed and provide good support to the school. They are closely involved with the headteacher in providing a new strategic development plan.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory overall. Performance management is identifying strengths and weaknesses in teaching but could be sharper. The evaluation of the development priorities is satisfactory. There is good evaluation of performance at Key Stage 4 where target setting is effective in helping pupils achieve but better use of data is required at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form.
The strategic use of resources	Financial planning is good. The school makes good use of existing resources. It has budgeted well to enable improvements to the accommodation to be made although more needs to be done, in

particular, to improve the very poor accommodation in art.
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Although the new headteacher had only been in post two months (at the time of the inspection), he has already identified clearly what needs to be done to build on the school's strengths and bring further improvements, including the more strategic use of performance data and reviewing leadership roles to increase the focus on quality by key staff. The governors are fully involved in this process. Overall, the principles of best value are applied satisfactorily.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children are expected to work hard. • Children make good progress. • Children like school. • Children are helped to be mature and responsible. • The teaching is good. • The behaviour is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of homework provided (not enough in Years 7, 8 and 9). • The way in which the school keeps them informed about progress. • How closely the school works with parents. <p><i>Note: as indicated by a minority in their response to the questionnaire.</i></p>

The inspectors wholly agree with the parents' positive views of the school. The inspectors also found that the school does keep parents well informed about progress and works closely with them to ensure children are happy and achieving at school. The team did find, however, that parents concerns about homework were justified in that it is not set consistently as laid out in the schedule and some of the homework is not of a quality to add greatly to pupils' learning.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

CHURCHILL COMMUNITY SCHOOL

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The Sixth Form is much larger than the national average. There are currently 377 students, 193 male and 184 female. The numbers have been relatively stable over the last few years. There are no students from minority ethnic backgrounds. The Sixth Form offers 30 courses at Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced (A2) level. It also offers three Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) courses and one Intermediate General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) course. There are GCSE retake courses in English language and mathematics. There are no shared courses with other institutions. About two-thirds of the Year 11 pupils stay on into the Sixth Form. Approximately one-third of the Sixth Formers come from other schools. All of the students on A-level courses have five or more A*-C grades at GCSE; those on the AVCE courses have at least four.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The overall provision in the Sixth Form is good and there are some very good features. The results are well above average. It has maintained this level of performance over the last few years and has considerably expanded the range of courses offered. Considering their GCSE performance, almost all students achieve at least as well as expected in most or all of their subjects. Management of the Sixth Form in the context of the whole school is good. The leadership and management of the director of the Sixth Form and his team are very good. The provision meets the needs of almost all the students and is cost-effective.

Strengths

- The well above average examination results.
- The very good progress made by students in English language, psychology, biology and in the business courses.
- The good quality of the teaching.
- The breadth of the curriculum at A-level.
- The very positive attitudes of the students.
- The teachers' support for the students' academic and personal development.

What could be improved

- Standards in art and history.
- Analysis of data on student performance to judge the overall effectiveness of the Sixth Form and to set targets for students and subjects.
- The provision of more opportunities for vocational study at non-advanced level.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan. Strengths and areas for improvement in individual subjects are identified in the sections on individual subjects in the full report.

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

The table below shows overall judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses that were inspected in the Sixth Form. Judgements are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the Sixth Form were inspected.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Satisfactory. Results are above average; boys perform more highly than girls. Both boys' and girls' results are in line with what would be expected given their GCSE results. The teaching is satisfactory.
Biology	Very good. Results are well above average. Many do better than expected given their GCSE results. The teaching is very good. The teachers have very good subject knowledge and set high standards.
Chemistry	Good. Results are consistently well above average, with some 'value-added' from GCSE. The teaching is good.
Textiles	Good. The results in 2001 were average. However, good teaching is ensuring that the students currently in Year 13 are achieving well.
Health and Social Care	Good. The results have been well above average. The teaching is good.
Business	Very good. Results are above average. Most do better than expected given their GCSE results. The teaching is very good.
Art	Poor. Results in 2001 were well below average and showed a significant drop from the previous year. Weaknesses in leadership and in the teaching lead to underachievement by the students. The accommodation is very poor.
Geography	Satisfactory. Results were below average in 2001 and many students did not do as well as expected given their GCSE results. The standards and achievement of the students currently in Year 13 are, however, better. The teaching is satisfactory.
History	Unsatisfactory. The results are below average and many students do not achieve as expected. There are weaknesses in the teaching, including a narrow range of activities and resources.
Sociology	Good. The results are consistently well above average, with some 'value-added' from GCSE. The teaching is good.
Psychology	Very good. Results are above average. The students do significantly better than expected, given their GCSE results. The teaching is very good. A significant strength is the teachers' skill in questioning.
English	Very good in language; good in literature. The results are well above average and the students' achievement is very good in language. Results in 2001 in literature were average though students currently in Year 13 are achieving above average standards. The teaching is very good in language and good in literature.
French	Satisfactory. Results in 2001 were below average and showed a downward trend. The students' achievement was below that expected from their GCSE results. The students currently in Year 13 are achieving

	higher standards. The teaching is satisfactory.
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In other subjects work was sampled. The teaching was at least satisfactory in all lessons seen. Very good teaching was seen in sports studies, religious education, product design, physics and theatre studies. Good teaching was seen in Spanish, leisure and recreation, media studies and economics.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	The students receive very good guidance and support from the induction sessions before they join and throughout Years 12 and 13. Information about courses is good. Very good guidance is given on living away from home and coping with the increased independence in organising study. Careers guidance is good. Help in applying to higher education is very good.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Sixth Form	Good in most respects. The leadership and management of the director and his team are very good. They have established and maintained a very positive ethos. The level of support they provide is a key factor in the maintenance of above average standards. The main weakness is at school level and relates to weak use of data to judge overall effectiveness or to set targets for students and subjects.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the Sixth Form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their choice of courses. • The arrangements to help them settle in. • The teaching and the accessibility of their teachers. • The encouragement for independent study. • They enjoy being in the Sixth Form and would recommend it to others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on their progress. • Advice on what to do after leaving. • Support if they had personal difficulties. • The range of other activities. • Being treated more as young adults. <p><i>Note: as indicated by a minority in responding to the student questionnaire.</i></p>

In their interviews with over 50 students the inspectors explored further the areas which a minority had identified in the questionnaire as areas that could be improved. The students interviewed were overwhelmingly positive about all the areas. In the view of the inspectors both personal support and the range of additional activities are very good. Information on progress is generally good. Careers advice is good though there is room for wider advice to those not intent on higher education. Opportunities for students to exercise responsibility and to be consulted are good. The strengths identified by the students are well founded.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Inspectors make judgements about provision in subjects and courses, and about leadership and management, in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor;

very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement 'outstanding' in further education and Sixth Form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to 'very weak'.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Well above average GCSE results and good achievement as a result of effective teaching.

1. The school attained well above average standards overall in GCSE for the last three years. Both boys and girls attained well above average results in their average points score and in the proportion of A*-C grades obtained in these years. Boys achieved slightly better than their counterparts nationally. The inspection found the achievement of pupils to be good overall at Key Stage 4 (Years 10 and 11). Pupils with special educational needs and the gifted and talented achieve well. The school's attainment trend line (for the last five years) is rising at broadly the same rate as the national rate. The school also achieved its target for the proportion of A*-C grades in 2001 and exceeded that for its average point score.

2. Standards in music are high; the proportion of pupils attaining the highest grades (A*/A) in 2001 was more than twice the national average. Pupils who are talented musically do particularly well. All of this is clearly achieved by committed staff and skilled, specialist teaching, some of which was observed during the inspection. It is also reflected in the success of the ambitious extra-curricular music provision.

3. Well above average GCSE results were obtained in 2001 in design and technology, economics, science, English literature, German, Spanish and physical education.

4. The results were above average in mathematics, French, geography and history, and broadly average in English language, business studies and drama.

5. Lesson observation and scrutiny of pupils' work during the inspection indicated standards at Key Stage 4 to be well above average and achievement to be good in English and science. In mathematics, standards are above average and achievement is satisfactory. Standards in art and design, however, were well below average in 2001.

6. During the inspection, lesson observations confirmed the good teaching overall at this key stage. Very good subject knowledge and work well tuned to the examination requirements characterised the most effective teaching. Warm relationships, challenging questions and good pace were also clearly evident. For instance, in a Year 10 science lesson, the teacher stimulated pupils' interest by asking challenging questions about the chemical properties of sodium chloride and halogens, linking them to everyday experience. The pupils demonstrated good understanding of atomic structure and why halogens are very reactive. In another science lesson, the teacher's very clear instructions enabled pupils to tackle, confidently, a practical investigation of forces and record their results accurately. In the process, the teacher demonstrated well the mathematical calculations required to compute and record the results. In an English lesson on the media, the teacher used her very good subject knowledge to provide challenging questions, demonstrating high expectations of precision and accuracy in pupils' responses. Pupils' showed good understanding of the required technical vocabulary to 'deconstruct' media texts and the teacher used a powerful article to enable them to identify these aspects in action, for example, the use of puns, opinion/prejudice and 'emotional lexis' to engage the reader. The very good marking makes a real difference to the quality of pupils' subsequent work in English.

7. In a food technology lesson, the teacher's high expectations were evident in the quality of the question and answer interaction with the class. They were also demonstrated

in the quality of the coursework projects pupils had carried out, for example, one on lowering cholesterol which led to a very good investigation of a number of food dishes, another on the problem of various food products for diabetics. In both instances, pupils used computers well to analyse questionnaire responses and provide accurate graphic representation of data.

8. Occasionally, the teaching does not provide sufficient challenge for all pupils. For instance, in a mathematics lesson, which was well structured to address pupils' difficulties in understanding quadratic equations, the teacher conducted a helpful question and answer session, making links to the skills of factorisation. However, the work was too elementary for those who had already mastered the skill of factorising trinomials and hence these (few) pupils did not make sufficient progress. Similarly, in a modern foreign language lesson, listening and speaking tasks allowed pupils to perform adequately but did not require them to move beyond their 'comfort zone' or make a great deal of intellectual effort.

9. Since the last inspection, a system of target setting has been put in place. Pupils are given 'minimum' and 'challenge' target grades, which are based on their prior attainment (in the National Curriculum tests in Year 9) and teacher assessment. These are shared with pupils and checked at particular points (for example, after the Year 10 examinations and the 'mock' GCSEs in Year 11) to see that pupils are on track to achieve them. Extra support, including mentoring and extra classes, are provided in Year 11 to help those in danger of falling behind. The system works well, making a difference to pupils' learning in most subjects at the key stage.

Good teaching also leads to well above average standards and good achievement in the Sixth Form.

10. The quality of teaching in the Sixth Form is good and has a positive impact on the students' learning and the results that they achieve. It has enabled the school to maintain well above average results in the Sixth Form for the last three years. This applies to all advanced examinations – A-level, Advanced Supplementary (AS) and Advanced GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification). In 2001, male and female students performed equally well. The results were well above average in comparison both with all maintained schools with Sixth Forms and also with all post-16 providers. In the first of the new AS (Advanced Subsidiary) examinations in 2001, good results were achieved in most subjects.

11. In all the lessons seen a key strength is the teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject. In the vast majority this is accompanied by an enthusiasm for the subject that has a positive impact on the students' motivation, on their willingness to extend themselves intellectually and to work at a good pace. In most lessons, effective planning builds well on the students' previous learning. Stimulating research projects lead to good use of study time and good ability to work independently. Expectations are particularly high in biology, English language, business and psychology, and also in chemistry and in sociology. In these subjects, probing questioning and very good assessment and feedback to the students on how to improve further are key factors contributing to the high standards attained. Gifted students do particularly well in these subjects.

12. The inspection found very good teaching is ensuring well above average standards and very good achievement in English language, biology, psychology and in business. As a result of good teaching, the students' achievement is good in chemistry, textiles, sociology and in health and social care. In mathematics, geography, English literature and in French the students are doing as well as expected, considering their GCSE performance. In neither art nor history, however, are they achieving as well as they should be; weaknesses in teaching and management are leading to under-performance in these two subjects. In geography, standards are improving and the students' progress is now satisfactory. Gifted

students achieve well; several achieved five A grades at A-level. There are no students with English as an additional language in the Sixth Form. The very small number of students with special educational needs are achieving well.

Within subjects, particular strengths include:

- the students' research skills in biology, textiles and in English language;
- the students' ability to analyse and evaluate in business, sociology and psychology;
- well-structured and argued essays in English, psychology and sociology;
- listening skills in French.

13. Specific weaknesses include difficulty in synthesising information and ideas in art and in the analysis and evaluation of information in history.

14. Most students have good levels of competence in communication skills, which support their achievement in subjects.

The pupils' positive attitudes and motivation.

15. The pupils' attitudes, both in the main school and in the Sixth Form, are very positive. Pupils are well motivated and keen to achieve. The atmosphere in the school is friendly and relaxed but purposeful in lessons. Behaviour outside of lessons is also good; pupils enjoy socialising at breaks and lunchtimes and do so sensibly. Incidents of bullying are very rare. The majority of parents, responding to the questionnaire, indicated that their children like school and that it helps them to become mature and responsible. Relationships between pupils and teachers and other adults are good; in the Sixth Form they are very good.

16. In lessons, pupils co-operate well and are developing confidence in asking questions which help their learning. In most lessons, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form, good routines have been established. Pupils enter their classes expecting to get down to work without delay and to sustain their concentration throughout the lesson. In a Year 11 English lesson, for example, the pupils were very attentive and clearly keen to get the best results in their examinations, making the most of everything the teacher offered. In a Year 10 drama lesson, pupils showed their enjoyment by participating well and working hard to improve their improvisations. Most take pride in presenting their work well; this is most evident in the very good finished coursework for GCSE. The good focus on developing pupils' learning skills, particularly their ability to analyse and to exercise precision in interpreting information, is clearly motivating many. This was seen working to good effect during the inspection in a number of subjects, for example, in music, where Year 9 pupils enjoyed, and showed skill, in listening to a film soundtrack in order to elicit particular instrumental effects and comment on their impact. Pupils participate enthusiastically in question and answer sessions and grasp opportunities to show their knowledge and understanding. For example, in a Year 8 mathematics lesson, pupils confidently complied when asked to explain their mathematical reasoning and demonstrate calculations on the whiteboard.

17. In the Sixth Form, the students are mature and responsible. In lessons, they show sustained concentration and a willingness to persevere with challenging tasks and engage enthusiastically in opportunities to discuss and debate issues. Most students take advantage of the many opportunities to broaden their experience by participating in extra-curricular opportunities. In Year 12, they willingly contribute to the school 'Help' scheme through which they support tutor groups and individual pupils in the main school.

18. There is some misbehaviour by a small number of pupils, mainly at Key Stage 3, however. This is manifested by a tendency to be slow to get started with work, being too 'chatty' and calling out inappropriately. The school has generally good systems for dealing with misbehaviour, including the appropriate use of temporary exclusions, but lesson monitoring could be more rigorous in picking up and addressing this kind of low-level off-task behaviour. Furthermore, there are some inconsistencies in the use of tutor time in the main school, and opportunities for pupils to exercise responsibility could be increased.

Strong extra-curricular provision in music and sport.

19. The school has a well-deserved reputation for strong extra-curricular provision in music and sport. It also has a strong tradition of successful dramatic productions stage at the Playhouse in Weston Super Mare.

20. It has held the national Sports Mark award at Gold level for several years. A wide variety of sports activities is offered, taking place at lunchtime and after school. Care is taken to cater separately for girls' and boys' preferences as well as making good mixed provision. Hockey, netball, dance and girls' rugby and football are provided; several boys' teams are also active in both rugby and football in season. In addition, badminton, trampolining, basketball, canoeing, swimming, squash and table tennis are available to both boys and girls and are very well attended. There is very good involvement in competitive sport. The many football, rugby and netball teams regularly play matches against other schools in tournaments, county trials and Sunday league matches. The 1st XV rugby team were on tour in South America last year and a number of boys have since gone on to play for Somerset, South West and England teams. One boy has been selected for the Wales Exiles. Teams also regularly compete in cross-country and hockey fixtures. Two girls have been selected for the U14 Avon County Hockey Squad. A further two have recently been very successful in the UK Athletics Championships. Other provision includes trips abroad, involvement in Outward Bound, the Ten Tors challenge, the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, RYA dinghy sailing courses, dance performances and visits to the ballet. Chess playing is also valued, with regular involvement in tournaments.

21. Extensive extra-curricular musical opportunities are provided and performance is of a high standard. Between 200 and 300 pupils regularly participate in musical activities. There are approximately 14 musical groups active throughout the year, including senior and junior orchestras, concert band, string ensemble, senior choir, junior and senior gospel choir, a jazz group, advanced jazz, and rock workshop. The senior gospel choir has won a national competition and is particularly well known for the quality of its performance. The groups are given regular opportunities to perform, for example, in the 2001 Christmas Presentation concert which was highly praised by parents. This strong provision is of a piece with the very good standards attained in music through the mainstream curriculum, which includes a high proportion of A*/A grades obtained at GCSE.

The quality of care and guidance in the Sixth Form.

22. The arrangements to promote students' general well-being are very good and this is a strong aspect of the Sixth Form. The tutors know their students very well and provide very good personal support.

23. The information, advice and guidance to the students, in relation to their subject choices and post-school aspirations, are very good. In Year 11 each year there is a major in-school careers convention which includes the other local post-16 institutions. All Year 11 pupils receive an individual careers interview. Detailed information is provided on all the courses available in the school Sixth Form. Almost all the schools' students go on to higher

education and the support programme is planned to meet their needs. Units within the Personal and Social Development (PSD) programme are very effective in preparing students for life away from home. Support for application to higher education is first-class. There is a further in-school careers convention in Year 12 and a six-week careers module within the Year 12 PSD programme. In Year 12, all attend a higher education conference at Bath University and many participate in open days at specific institutions. Support for those who do not aspire to higher education is good once they have been identified. They have individual careers interviews and ongoing support from one of the senior tutors and are given help in finding work placements

24. The tutors operate an open door policy to give the students ready access to help and guidance. Regular one-to-one interviews take place between students and tutors. Individual attendance and personal difficulties are closely monitored. The use of a system which actively monitors how they are doing, and results in letters of praise or concern, is valued by the students. The system provides very good personal support for all, ensuring that problems are picked up quickly and praise given where it is due. The tutor-taught PSD programme provides good guidance in careers, study and life skills and other aspects of personal and social development. Outside agencies enhance this programme through the delivery, for example, of first aid and driving skills programmes.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The below average standards in art at GCSE and A-level and the very poor accommodation in art.

25. The GCSE results in art and design were well below average in the last two years. Boys' results were low. Of the three lessons observed during the inspection two were satisfactory in most respects, one was good. Teachers have good subject knowledge which they use to plan lessons effectively by and large. However, there was insufficient challenge for more able pupils in two of the lessons. This, coupled with limited space and inadequate resources to stimulate a creative response, resulted in off-task behaviour by some pupils (mainly boys) and limited progress.

26. The A-level results in 2001 showed a significant drop in performance over the previous year and were well below average. Not all students who took the examination gained a pass grade and the proportion gaining the higher A-B grades was well below average. Both male and female students significantly underachieved when compared to their other subjects. In relation to their GCSE results, students did less well than expected. The proportion of students not continuing from the AS course in Year 12 to the A2 course in Year 13 is greater than in most other subjects. The standards of current Year 13 students are also well below average, although students in Year 12 are achieving better because the work is more structured to their needs. Whilst teachers have good subject knowledge and show enthusiasm and commitment, there are weaknesses in the planning, the teaching strategies used and assessment, all of which have an impact on learning.

27. The leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory. The department handbook indicates that a number of strategies have been taken to improve GCSE results over recent years, including a focus on boys' achievement. There is little evidence so far that they are having significant impact. There is no doubt that the very poor accommodation is having an adverse effect (see next paragraph) but there are weaknesses over and beyond those caused by the accommodation, which require action. The monitoring of teaching quality, both in the main school and the Sixth Form, needs to be more sharply focused on the degree of challenge provided for pupils, and particularly the more able. The tracking of progress is not picking up pupils who are falling behind soon enough and providing

support/remedial provision to ensure they achieve their targets. The accommodation also needs to be radically overhauled without delay.

28. The department suffers from very poor accommodation. It is sited in mobile classrooms, three of which are particularly dilapidated although some improvement work (new windows on one side) has been carried out in the recent past. Nonetheless, they are currently in a state which is not conducive to good learning. Outside, they are in need of painting and refurbishment and the surrounding area requires clearing and landscaping. Inside, the floor is disintegrating in parts, creating a safety hazard; there is accumulated dirt and clutter (one room is worse than the other), insufficient display space and storage, and limited ICT provision which cannot be used properly. The area is very off-putting and does not encourage an attitude of pride in work. The head of department has made several attempts to get improvements with limited success. Records show that the governors and previous headteacher have made improvements to ensure health and safety in the past whilst, at the same time, energetically pursuing a bid for a new building from the local education authority. So far, this has not been successful although the new headteacher and governors are actively pursuing it again at present.

The use of performance data to promote pupils' progress at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form.

29. Whilst the school has put in place a system of target setting and pupil tracking at Key Stage 4, it has not done so systematically for the Sixth Form and its attempt to provide a system for Key Stage 3 was unsuccessful. Achievement at Key Stage 3 is not unsatisfactory but there is inconsistency in learning across subjects. The results of the National Curriculum tests in Year 9 for the last two years showed standards to be above average in English and mathematics and well above in science. Compared to similar schools in 2001, based on free school meal data, English was below average, mathematics in line with the average and science above. Inspection evidence from lesson observation and scrutiny of work indicates that standards in English and mathematics are above average. Achievement is satisfactory but could be further improved in both subjects. In science, standards are well above average and achievement is good. Sampling of lessons across other subjects at the key stage shows variation in the extent to which pupils are challenged and enabled to achieve their potential. The tracking of progress is inconsistent across subjects. Pupils are not sufficiently aware of the levels at which they are operating nor what they have to do to improve their work and achieve a higher level.

30. In the Sixth Form there is a lack of rigorous analysis of data on the students' performance. The school's self-evaluation of the Sixth Form is based almost exclusively on parental and student satisfaction and on the raw examination results. Only minimal use is made of value-added information, and this is limited to local data. Consequently, the school does not have a clear view of whether its above average intake into the Sixth Form is doing as well as it should be, or, indeed, better than that. A large amount of data is sent to subject leaders. The information is very detailed, contains much statistical jargon and does not include an analytical commentary. As a consequence, subject staff, therefore, make relatively little use of it.

The inconsistency of homework at Key Stage 3.

31. A significant minority of the parents responding to the questionnaire about the school indicated that they had concerns about homework. Their main points were that there was insufficient homework in Years 7 to 9 and that homework diaries were not checked consistently by teachers. Inspection evidence confirmed that there was some cause for concern. Scrutiny of homework diaries and discussion with pupils showed that homework is

not set consistently at Key Stage 3, as required by the schedule, and that sometimes it is not of a quality to add much to the learning of pupils.

32. At Key Stage 4, homework is appropriately linked to the demands of coursework and examination learning/revision.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

The school should now:

Main school

- (1) Improve the below average standards in art at GCSE and A-level and the poor accommodation in art, by:
- ◆ Improving the planning, teaching strategies and assessment;
 - ◆ Monitoring the teaching more rigorously, with particular focus on the degree of challenge provided;
 - ◆ Providing targets for pupils, tracking their progress against them and taking action to support those in danger of falling behind;
 - ◆ Providing radically improved accommodation as soon as possible with more learning, storage and display space;
 - ◆ More immediately, thoroughly cleaning the current accommodation, including the windows, and improving the flooring.

(See paragraphs 25 – 28 and 115 – 120)

- (2) Develop the use of performance data to promote pupils' progress at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form, by:
- ◆ Using national benchmark data to compare pupils' performance on a regular basis, and to set targets for individuals, subjects and groups;
 - ◆ Providing training for staff, and building discussion of data and progress against targets into the meeting structure.

(See paragraphs 29, 30 and 65)

- (3) Improve the consistency of homework at Key Stage 3, by:
- ◆ Monitoring the setting of homework according to the schedule and checking the quality.

(See paragraph 31)

Two minor issues the school should consider including in the action plan are: improving the use of tutor time in the main school, and providing more opportunities for pupils to take responsibility. (See paragraph 18)

Sixth form

- (1) Improve standards in art and history, by
- ◆ improving the teaching and the quality of leadership in each subject;
 - ◆ improving both resources and accommodation in art;
 - ◆ extending the range of teaching activities and use of different texts in history.

(See paragraphs 115, 116 and 127, 128)

- (2) Analyse data on student performance to judge the overall effectiveness of the Sixth Form and to set targets for students and subjects, by:
- ◆ providing simpler, easier to interpret data for subjects;
 - ◆ using comparisons with national data.

(See paragraph 65)

- (3) Provide more opportunities for vocational study at non-advanced level, by:
- ◆ investigating possibilities to enable more students to pursue vocational study from Years 10 – 11 into the Sixth Form.

(See paragraph 51)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	43
	Sixth form	70
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		52

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	1	6	22	12	2	0	0
Percentage	2	14	51	28	5	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	1	25	26	15	3	0	0
Percentage	1	36	37	21	4	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for Years 7 – 11, as each lesson represents more than two percentage points, and in the Sixth Form as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1320	377
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	65	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	24	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	220	1

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	4

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	27
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	50

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.6
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.7
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	127	132	259

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	80	98	100
	Girls	103	103	108
	Total	183	201	208
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	71 (75)	77 (75)	80 (76)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	26 (32)	54 (52)	45 (49)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	88	103	113
	Girls	110	110	118
	Total	198	213	231
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	76 (76)	82 (75)	89 (82)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	34 (41)	50 (44)	48 (42)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	109	129	238

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	67	105	108
	Girls	84	121	126
	Total	151	226	234
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	66 (62)	99 (96)	99 (97)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	48.9
	National	39.0

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0
	National	N/a

Attainment at the end of the sixth form (Year 13)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	106	93	199
	Average point score per candidate	21.5	21.4	21.4
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18.0	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	106	92	198	7	6	13
	Average point score per candidate	20.7	20.7	20.7	12.9	13.0	12.9
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	1
Indian	2
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
White	1694
Any other minority ethnic group	

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	119	4
Other minority ethnic groups		

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Sixth Form

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	107.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.8

Education support staff: Y7 – Sixth Form

Total number of education support staff	17
Total aggregate hours worked per week	534

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Sixth Form

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	27
Key Stage 4	23.8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year /End March	2001
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	£
Total income	4,660,342
Total expenditure	4,582,809
Expenditure per pupil	2,750
Balance brought forward from previous year	190,962
Balance carried forward to next year	268,495

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	29.2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	31.6

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	3
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1697
Number of questionnaires returned	325

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	31	57	10	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	36	54	5	1	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	19	62	10	2	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	19	49	24	7	1
The teaching is good.	21	63	5	1	10
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	17	44	27	9	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	41	47	8	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	48	47	3	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	17	43	30	5	5
The school is well led and managed.	29	46	7	1	17
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	27	58	6	2	7
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	37	46	9	1	7

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

33. The school's results in the 2001 examinations were well above average. This was so in respect of students entered for all advanced examinations – A-level, Advanced Supplementary (AS) and Advanced GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification). Male and female students performed equally well. The results were well above average in comparison both with all maintained schools with Sixth Forms and with all post-16 providers. Subjects with well above average results included biology, chemistry, physics, English language, sociology and Leisure and Recreation (GNVQ). Above average results were achieved in business (A-level and GNVQ), general studies and mathematics. The school's results were, however, below average in French, geography and history and well below in art. In the other subjects, the results were either average or there were too few entries to allow secure statistical comparison.

34. Local value-added information shows that the students achieved very well in business, design and technology, English language, general studies, biology and psychology. This is in relation to their overall GCSE results two years earlier. They did not achieve as well as they should have in geography, history, art and modern languages. The school does not use value-added data to compare its results with the national picture. A rough calculation by the inspection team, based on the available evidence, indicates that in 2001 most students had achieved at least as well as expected in most, though not all, subjects. The school has not set specific targets for its Sixth Form results.

35. Overall, the school has maintained its well above average results in the last three years. This is so, even though, technically, the results in 2000 were above rather than well above average. The published 2000 results omitted some 40 students who sat their general studies examination one year earlier, all achieving grades A-C. Had their results been included, the school's overall average points score would have been well above average, as in the other years.

36. In the first of the new AS (Advanced Subsidiary) examination in 2001, good results were achieved in most subjects. For example, more than 50 per cent of the students achieved the highest grades (A/B) in English language, mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, sociology, psychology, media studies, theatre studies and music. They did not do so well in art, history and general studies. At the time of publication of this report national comparative data was not available for AS-level.

37. Once embarked on their courses, whether AS (almost exclusively Year 12 students) or A2 (Year 13) very few drop out. Numbers in the A2 classes are lower than they were in Year 12, reflecting the students' decisions on which subjects they wish to concentrate on. Higher than average drop out from Year 12 to Year 13 in art and history reflects the unsatisfactory results in these two subjects at the end of Year 12.

38. The standards summarised above are evident in the work of the students currently halfway through their AS and A2 courses. Very good teaching is ensuring well above average standards and very good achievement in English language, biology, psychology and business. As a result of good teaching, the students' achievement is good in chemistry, textiles, sociology and health and social care. In mathematics, geography, English literature and French the students are doing as well as expected, considering their GCSE performance. In neither art nor history, however, are they achieving as well as they should;

weaknesses in teaching and management are leading to under-performance in these two subjects. In geography, standards are improving and the students' progress is now satisfactory. Gifted students achieve well; several achieved five A grades at A-level. There are no students with English as an additional language in the Sixth Form. The very small number of students with special educational needs are achieving well.

Within subjects, particular strengths include:

- the students' research skills in biology, textiles and in English language;
- the students' ability to analyse and evaluate in business, sociology and psychology;
- well-structured and argued essays in English, psychology and sociology;
- listening skills in French.

39. Specific weaknesses include difficulty in synthesising information and ideas in art and in the analysis and evaluation of information in history.

40. Most students have good levels of competence in communication skills, which support their achievement in their subject work. For example, many are able to discuss abstract ideas coherently. They use a good range of printed and other material to select relevant information. Their skills in numeracy and in ICT are at least adequate to enable them to cope with the demands of their courses. They use the Internet well for research in a wide range of subjects.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

41. The students' attitudes to their learning and to life in the Sixth Form are very positive. They participate keenly in most lessons, demonstrating a clear interest in understanding the new and often challenging concepts presented to them. In almost all lessons, most show sustained concentration and a willingness to persevere even when tasks are initially difficult.

42. Their behaviour is very good. Within the Sixth Form area, despite severe overcrowding at key times of the day, there is a good atmosphere. Male and female students, Year 12 and Year 13 students mix well together. In discussions with inspectors, students were relaxed and willing to talk, with little prompting, of their enjoyment of the subjects they are studying and what they had learnt.

43. The students' personal development is very good. Most take advantage of the many opportunities to broaden their experience by participating in extra-curricular activities, especially in sport and music and also in travel abroad. In their studies most are rapidly developing the skills of research and independence that will benefit them when they leave school. Year 13 students are clearly looking forward to further study. In Year 12 almost all participate willingly in the school 'Help' scheme, helping out in the main school, in tutor groups, with individual pupils, and with subject teachers. They respond well to the often stimulating sessions in both general studies and the Personal and Social Development (PSD) programmes. Every day, a group of students operate a litter control in the village. Each year they support a major charity.

44. Relationships are very good, both amongst the students themselves and with their teachers and tutors. The students show a good level of respect for the views of others and participate maturely in debate. The students' attendance is good.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

45. The quality of teaching in the Sixth Form is good and has a positive impact on the students' learning and the results that they achieve. Of the lessons seen during the inspection almost all were at least satisfactory, three-quarters were judged to be at least good, and one-third to be very good. Taking into account the results achieved, the value added compared to the students' previous attainment, the standards in work scrutinised and the lessons seen, the teaching is judged to be:

- very good in biology, English language, psychology and in the business courses;
- good in chemistry, textiles, sociology and in health and social care;
- satisfactory in geography, French and mathematics;
- less than satisfactory in art and history.

46. In all the lessons seen a key strength is the teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject. In the vast majority this is accompanied by an enthusiasm for the subject that has a positive impact on the students' motivation, on their willingness to extend themselves intellectually and to work at a good pace. In most lessons effective planning builds well on the students' previous learning. Stimulating research projects lead to good use of study time and good ability to work independently. Expectations are particularly high in biology, English language, business and psychology, and also in chemistry and sociology. In these subjects, probing questioning and very good assessment and feedback to the students on how to improve further are key factors contributing to the high standards attained. Gifted students do particularly well in these subjects.

47. Many examples of very good teaching were seen. For instance, in a psychology lesson in Year 12, the teacher's very good questioning, explanations and stimulating resources enabled the students to develop a very good understanding of cultural and gender differences relating to stress. In a Year 12 English language lesson, the teacher's very good explanations of key distinctions such as 'dialect' and 'accent', 'incorrect' and 'non-standard' English and his ability to engender focused self-criticism from the students led to very good understanding on their part of how both to improve and to perform at the higher levels. In a Year 13 geography lesson, the teacher's probing questioning and high expectation of the students' responses enabled the students to draw mature conclusions in their discussion of economic, social and moral issues relating to the impact of trans-national companies in developing countries.

48. In the very small number of less than satisfactory lessons, activities that were either too easy or too difficult and a lack of variety led to a slow pace of learning. General weaknesses in a number of art lessons include a lack of structure to the lesson, too little direction for the students and insufficient information to them as to how they are progressing. The latter leads to some frustration on their part when their results are not as good as expected. In history, general weaknesses include a lack of variety in the teaching resources and a lack of clarity in the objectives for the lesson.

49. Although subjects do not have direct responsibility for key skills as defined in Curriculum 2000, nevertheless most teachers effectively develop those skills particularly relevant for success in the subject. This is particularly so in respect of communication skills. For example, note-taking and essay-writing skills are very well developed in English, psychology and sociology. Numeracy skills are adequately developed in psychology and in the sciences. In geography, the students present data well. The weakness in the teaching of key skills in subjects is in ICT. Although many students have ICT skills that are at least adequate, opportunities are missed, for example in biology and chemistry, to extend these skills.

50. In all subjects, with the relative exception of art and history, the teachers cater well for individual needs. The very small number of students with special educational needs are well taught.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS?

51. The school provides a very good range of advanced academic courses at both AS (Advanced Subsidiary) and A2 (Advanced) level. For example, in addition to subjects already studied in the main school, students can study sociology, psychology, accounts, business, media studies, sports studies, etc. There is an adequate range of vocational courses; Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) courses are offered in business, leisure and recreation and in health and social care. However, only one vocational course, business, is offered at Intermediate level. The school rightly sees little point in competing with nearby further education institutions in its non-advanced provision. Nevertheless, in a Sixth Form of almost 400 students it would not be unreasonable to offer slightly more for those students wishing to continue their studies at the school but not at Advanced Level.

52. For those who do enter the Sixth Form, the curriculum is well organised and the courses match their needs. Very few are not able to follow their chosen combination of subjects. Almost all who embark on their AS and/or A2 courses continue through to take the appropriate examination. Most groups are of a healthy size, allowing for considerable intellectual stimulation. Some are small but the teachers do their best to ensure that the students still have a stimulating experience. The school's introduction of Curriculum 2000 (the new pattern of modular examination and of new syllabuses in all subjects) has been good. Despite the uncertainties about expected standards at the end of the first year, most of the students performed well in the first AS examinations last summer.

53. Appropriate provision is made for the development of the key skills. The school found it impossible in the first year to maintain provision leading to full external accreditation. This was largely because of the pressures on the teachers of introducing the new AS courses. The school has therefore adopted a more pragmatic approach, with specific modules in the application of number, communication and in ICT within the general studies programme. Tasks are set and marked against the national criteria and sealed with in-house accreditation. The modules are very well planned and pitched at the appropriate level for advanced study.

54. The enrichment programme is very good. All students follow the general studies course and are entered for the examination. This in itself ensures a richer intellectual diet than that which would be provided by the students' subject choices alone. The personal and social development (PSD) programme is also well organised. In the spring term alone there are modules on careers, cooking, relationships, stereotyping, living away from home and global inequality. Sessions observed were of good quality. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities available in music and sport and for travel. All students participate in sporting or community activities once per week.

55. The overall provision is very effective in promoting the students' personal development. A six-week module of religious education in the general studies programme focuses on different systems of belief and on war and conflict. Representatives from the wider community make a significant contribution, for example the Israeli Trust in respect of the Holocaust. An assembly taken by the headteacher in the course of the inspection contained a strong spiritual element. Moral issues feature strongly for all students in PSD and general studies and, for example, in English, sociology and psychology. Opportunities for extending cultural understanding are good. For example, there are study visits to China

and Barcelona, skiing in Colorado, and theatre and other visits at home. Many opportunities are provided in lessons for the students to work together in pairs and groups and to help younger pupils in the main school.

56. Provision for careers is good and is effectively enriched by links with the local community. For example, representatives from business and the professions come into school to talk about their field of work. There is an in-house careers convention at the end of Year 12 and a major input within the PSD course in Year 12. Students not intending to go into higher education are given appropriate support once their intentions are clear. Advice on what is available in higher education and how to go about applying for a place is very good.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

57. The school's action in ensuring the students' health and safety is effective. Appropriate child protection procedures are fully in place. Liaison with tutors and other staff is very good and all are kept aware of child protection issues by one of the assistant headteachers. The school has an appropriate health and safety policy. The arrangements and records for dealing with first aid, sickness, accidents and emergencies are very good and well understood by students. Fire drills are regularly undertaken and accurate records kept. Overall, the arrangements to promote students' general well-being are very good and this is a strong aspect of the Sixth Form.

58. The information, advice and guidance to the students in relation to their subject choices and post-school aspirations are very good. In Year 11 each year there is a major in-school careers convention which includes the other local post-16 institutions. All Year 11 pupils receive an individual careers interview. Detailed information is provided on all the courses available in the school Sixth Form. Almost all the school's students go on to higher education. The support programme is therefore geared to their needs. Units within the PSD programme are very effective in preparing students for life away from home, for example, coping with landlord/ladies, surviving shared accommodation and coping with the greater independence in organising their study. Much of this is first-hand advice from tutors' own recent experience. Support for application to higher education is first class. There is a further in-school careers convention in Year 12 and a six-week careers module within the Year 12 PSD programme. In Year 12 all attend a higher education conference at Bath University and many participate in open days at specific institutions. All applications are sent off well before the deadline. Last year, all but a handful of students were accepted at their first or second choice institutions. Support for those who do not aspire to higher education is good once they have been identified. They have individual careers interviews and ongoing support from one of the senior tutors, and are given help in finding work placements.

59. The Sixth Form tutors know their students very well and provide very good personal support. Students interviewed all stated that they would have no difficulty in sharing problems with their tutor or with either the director or deputy director. The latter operate an open door policy to give the students ready access to help and guidance. Regular one-to-one interviews take place between students and tutors. Induction arrangements to support the students as they move into the Sixth Form are effective, helping the students to settle quickly and to feel confident in their new learning environment. Individual attendance and personal difficulties are closely monitored. The use of a system which actively monitors how they are doing and results in the issue of 'Cause for Concern' or 'Cause for Praise' letters is valued by the students. This provides very good personal support for all, ensuring that problems are picked up quickly and praise given when deserved. The tutor-taught PSD programme provides good guidance in careers, study and life skills and other aspects of personal and social development. Outside agencies enhance this programme through the delivery, for example, of first aid and driving skills programmes.

60. Procedures for the assessment of the students' work are very good in biology, chemistry, English language and psychology. They are at least satisfactory and often good in other subjects. In art, however, procedures are insufficiently rigorous, leaving students insecure as to how well, or otherwise, they are progressing. A key overall strength is the teachers' knowledge of the examination assessment criteria in their subjects. This was so, even through the difficult first year of the new AS courses last year. Assessments are accurate and reliable and written comments often provide good advice on how to improve. Most subjects use the information from their assessments well in planning for individual students and in reviewing their courses. The students interviewed spoke appreciatively of the feedback, often oral, which they receive. Reports to parents give a reasonable picture of progress and of areas for improvement. The methods used to indicate the standards the students are achieving are, however, inconsistent and confusing. Some do so as examination marks, others as current or predicted grades.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS?

61. Parents at the pre-inspection parents meeting stated that they were happy with overall provision in the Sixth Form. They were pleased with the induction arrangements, with the help and support in making applications to higher education and with the general support and guidance their children receive whilst in the Sixth Form.

62. In their responses to the questionnaire the students indicated that they are happy overall with Sixth Form but were not uncritical about some aspects. They are particularly happy about their choice of courses, the teaching and the accessibility of their teachers, and with the induction arrangements. Aspects about which a minority were not so happy included information on progress, advice on what to do after school, support if in personal difficulty, the range of extra activities available and whether the school treated them as young adults and listened to their views. The inspection team followed up these points in discussions with approximately 60 students. They were overwhelmingly positive about each of the points. Some did, however, point out that some students did not always behave as young adults and that those who did not aspire to higher education sometimes felt a bit left out. Others commented that although there was a good range of activities, there was more choice in sport for boys than for girls. The school drew attention to the fact that advice about what to do after leaving school had not been undertaken for Year 12 at the time the questionnaires were distributed and that this may have influenced some of the responses. Overall, and despite this conflicting evidence, it is the view of the inspection team that the vast majority of the students have positive views and that this is a key factor in their own enthusiastic involvement.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

63. The leadership and the management of the Sixth Form are good in most respects within the context of the whole school. The leadership and management of the Sixth Form management team, under the direction of the director of the Sixth Form, are very good.

64. The director of the Sixth Form gives a strong lead and has been very effective in establishing and maintaining a very positive ethos in the Sixth Form area and in promoting good team spirit among the students and staff. This is a key factor in the students' enthusiasm for being in the Sixth Form, and their willingness to work hard and to take advantage of the many opportunities for personal development. It has also been an important factor in the maintenance of well above average standards and in encouraging good teaching. He has played a crucial role in the expansion of subject choice over the past few

years and in the successful implementation of Curriculum 2000 in the last year. The evaluation of the first year of the latter is exemplary in the rigour of its analysis. The Sixth Form enrichment programme, including the use of tutor time and the personal and social development provision, is very well organised and of good quality. Procedures for picking up quickly any falling off in performance of individual students and intervening to support them are good. In all of the above, he is ably supported by the deputy director and the two senior tutors. The deputy director is held in particular regard by many of the students for the quality of personal support that she provides.

65. The main weakness in the school's management of the Sixth Form is the lack of rigorous analysis of data on the students' performance. This function is placed within the wider senior management and is not the responsibility of the director of the Sixth Form. The school's self-evaluation of the Sixth Form is based almost exclusively on parental and student satisfaction and on the raw examination results, useful though these indicators are. Only minimal use of value-added information is made, and this is limited to local data. Consequently, the school does not have a clear view of whether its above average intake into the Sixth Form is doing as well as it should, or indeed better than that. A large amount of data is sent to subject leaders. The information is very detailed, contains much statistical jargon and does not include an analytical commentary. As a consequence, most subject leaders find it indigestible and make little use of it.

66. Nevertheless, senior managers and governors have a good awareness of strengths and weaknesses in subjects. Action has been taken with those subjects seen to be under-performing. This action is beginning to be effective in relation to geography. There is still some way to go in respect of art and history. In both these subjects action plans need to be more rigorous.

67. The Sixth Form is cost-effective. Although slightly more funding is put into the Sixth Form than is notionally received, this has no obvious negative effect on the quality of provision in the main school. Given the uncertainties surrounding the introduction of Curriculum 2000, particularly the need to continue all courses through for two years, a small amount of subsidy into the Sixth Form is not unreasonable. The principles of best value are applied in a general way. For example, account is taken of other local post-16 provision. The school could, however, be more rigorous in challenging itself in respect of overall effectiveness (see paragraph 65 above). The governing body could be more active in this respect, though it fulfils its statutory duties well. Staffing is very well matched to the needs of the curriculum; the teachers' subject knowledge and understanding is a key strength. Resources are generally good. Accommodation is generally adequate. For art, however, it is very poor.

PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 13 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	38	97	72	71	33	3.8	2.3
Biology	37	97	85	54	36	3.5	2.7
Chemistry	28	100	87	64	43	3.7	2.9
Physics	34	100	87	65	42	3.7	2.9
Design and Technology	4	75	85	0	26	2.0	2.4
Food Technology	1	100	N/A	0	N/A	2.0	N/A
Textiles	6	100	N/A	17	N/A	2.3	N/A
Accounting	17	71	N/A	35	N/A	2.4	N/A
Business Studies	40	95	88	30	29	2.7	2.6
Economics	15	100	N/A	80	N/A	4.3	5.5
Sports Studies	17	94	N/A	47	N/A	3.0	N/A
Art and Design	13	84	87	23	43	2.3	3.1
Media Studies	17	100	N/A	71	N/A	3.4	N/A
Music	17	100	94	70	44	4.1	3.2
Photography	11	73	N/A	0	N/A	1.2	N/A
Theatre Studies	6	100	N/A	83	N/A	4.2	N/A
Geography	72	99	91	46	40	3.3	3.0
History	46	94	94	13	43	2.3	3.1
Philosophy and Religion	12	100	92	1	42	2.3	3.0
Psychology	58	98	N/A	59	N/A	3.5	N/A
Sociology	17	82	N/A	53	N/A	3.1	N/A
General Studies	194	83	N/A	19	N/A	2.1	N/A
English Language	25	100	96	44	28	3.4	2.9
English Literature	36	100	94	52	37	3.4	3.0
French	11	100	90	46	45	3.6	3.0
German	5	100	91	60	42	3.8	3.0
Spanish	2	100	N/A	50	N/A	4.0	N/A

GCE A level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	49	98	87	45	43	6.3	5.8
Biology	34	100	88	59	34	6.7	5.3
Chemistry	33	100	90	58	43	6.9	5.9
Physics	22	100	88	55	40	7.4	5.6
Design and Technology	11	82	91	18	30	4.3	5.3
Home Economics	4	100	N/A	0	N/A	2.5	N/A
Textiles	3	100	N/A	66	N/A	7.3	N/A
Accounting	19	100	N/A	58	N/A	6.6	N/A
Business Studies	36	100	92	33	32	6.1	5.5
Economics	17	94	89	30	36	5.2	5.5
Sports Studies	18	100	92	45	25	6.7	5.1
Art and Design	23	100	96	26	46	4.7	6.5
Music	14	100	93	36	35	5.4	5.7
Photography	11	100	N/A	0	N/A	3.5	N/A
Theatre Studies	6	100	N/A	50	N/A	6.6	N/A
Geography	64	97	92	22	38	4.6	5.7
History	40	98	88	20	35	4.3	5.4
Philosophy and Religion	3	100	92	33	42	6.7	3.0
Psychology	34	100	87	32	64	5.9	5.3
Sociology	17	100	86	48	35	6.7	5.3
General Studies	185	100	85	30	30	5.7	4.9
English Language	20	100	95	55	37	7.4	5.9
English Literature	30	100	95	43	37	6.2	5.9
French	7	100	89	0	38	4.6	5.5
German	4	50	91	0	40	1.5	5.8
Spanish	2	100	89	0	39	2.0	5.7

Advanced vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business GNVQ	7	14	21	57	40	29	25
Health and Social Care GNVQ	1	0	15	0	40	100	28

Leisure and Tourism GNVQ	5	30	22	40	42	30	22
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Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business GNVQ Intermediate	10	40	0	50	0	10	0

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

68. The focus of the inspection was mathematics, biology and chemistry, but physics was also sampled. In physics, the A-level results in 2001 were well above average. One lesson was observed, in which very good teaching enabled the students to make very good progress in their understanding of particle accelerators and detectors.

Mathematics

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Good results in A-level examinations, especially by boys studying pure mathematics and mechanics.
- The teaching of fundamental skills and techniques in Year 12.
- The students' attitudes to learning are very good and contribute significantly to their progress.

Areas for improvement

- The students' understanding of general principles so as to apply them to unfamiliar (non-standard) problems more successfully.
- Efficient use of lesson time, particularly by providing more direct teaching in those lessons dominated by routine exercises.
- Use of national data on students' progress to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and so focus action more closely on improving achievement.

69. In 2001 the results in the GCE A-level examinations were above average, as has been the case in recent years. Almost half of the students attained the highest grades and almost all achieved a pass. That the school has maintained these standards during a period of considerable change in the structure of A-level courses, represents satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. With the exception of 1998, when girls' results were higher than those of boys, recent results show a consistent pattern of boys' results being significantly higher than girls'. Typically, boys attain results that are well above average; girls' results are broadly average. This difference arises as a result of the higher attainment on the pure mathematics and mechanics course followed predominantly by boys who benefit from their complementary study of physics. Nevertheless, the girls' results match closely those expected on the basis of their GCSE results. Very few students have dropped out of either the AS or A2 course.

70. The school has a high proportion of students who attain the standards at GCSE typical of A-level students nationally. From these, and others similarly qualified, the school recruits sufficient students to offer a good range of viable courses. A lower proportion of girls take A-level examinations than is the case nationally. Students work hard and achieve high standards by the end of Year 12. Most continue into Year 13 and, by the end, reach the standards of which their GCSE grades indicate they are capable. Consequently, both boys' and girls' achievement in each of the course options is satisfactory. In 2001, all those students who achieved well had followed the further mathematics course; all those who did not achieve the standards of which they were capable followed the pure mathematics with statistics option.

71. During the inspection, above average standards of work were evident both in lessons and in students' extensive written work. Basic algebraic, trigonometric and analytical techniques are learned thoroughly in pure mathematics but students find difficulty in drawing on knowledge from different aspects of their courses when encountering unfamiliar problems. The students learn basic identities but do not readily recognise where they can be used, for example, to simplify differentiation. Skills are applied confidently, such as those for resolving forces in kinematics, but analysis of compound functions depending on recognition of algebraic structures is insecure. During discussions, students demonstrated a good knowledge of fundamental techniques. Year 13 students readily cited integration by parts as a technique to consider when faced with the integration of a product. However, they were unable to identify processes of differentiation that might lead to a product of functions. In a similar way, Year 12 students knew that the factor theorem was a helpful tool for factorising higher order polynomials but were unclear about its application in specific examples.

72. Overall, the teaching is satisfactory. In the best lessons, the teachers plan work imaginatively. They engage students in purposeful discussions that reinforce and secure their learning. For example, Year 13 students prepared joint presentations demonstrating their solutions to a range of typical problems related to circular motion. Less confident students benefited from dialogue with stronger students. They, in turn, deepened their understanding of the key concepts by explaining their reasoning. Where the teaching employs lesson time well, incorporating a good balance of individual work and direct explanation, the learning is most efficient. By setting short tasks on which to build the main exposition, the teacher involved students in productive discussion of the stability conditions for a vehicle travelling on a banked track. Consequently, they quickly derived the boundary inequalities for themselves before moving on to exercises.

73. On occasions, the teachers' explanations lack the clarity necessary for students to learn efficiently. In one instance, the teacher had given insufficient consideration to the strands of reasoning required to explain the structure of the general term of a binomial expansion. Consequently, despite their sustained concentration, students became confused and took a long time to grasp the key points. Generally, lessons are satisfactory though the pace of teaching is not always sufficiently demanding. In one instance, a teacher worked briefly through some straightforward applications of differential calculus to trigonometric functions and set students exercises to reinforce their learning. However, the pace of learning slackened as students worked through tasks that they could easily have completed for homework, the teacher missing opportunities to pursue more challenging issues.

74. Overall, the leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. The subject manager is providing good leadership and satisfactory management during the temporary absence of the head of faculty. He analyses results carefully and has a good understanding of the action necessary to raise achievement. However, it is not the established practice of the department to compare students' performance with similar students nationally. Hence, the basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the department and its constituent teaching groups is not sufficiently secure for confident planning of improvement.

Biology

Overall, the quality of provision in biology is **very good**.

Strengths

- The A-level examination results in 2001 were well above the national average.
- The students' performance in external examinations is better than expected, given their GCSE grades.
- The teaching is very good.
- The vast majority of students are motivated, work hard, and have very good relationships with one another and with their teachers.
- Fieldwork reports are of high quality.

Areas for improvement

- The use of national statistics and the students' GCSE grades to set targets for AS and A2 performance and to monitor students' progress.
- ICT facilities in the Sixth Form laboratory and opportunities for the students to use ICT.

75. The A-level results in 2001 were well above the national average. During the last four years the A-level results have shown an improving trend. In the last three years, girls' performance has been better than that of boys, the difference being slightly greater than is the case nationally. In 2001, all but one of the students entered gained an A-level pass, and the retention rate was high. During the past three years, the students' performance in A-level biology has been better than the average for their other subjects; the margin is significantly better than the national difference. Thirty-seven students took the 2001 AS examination; all but one gained a pass; over 50 per cent gained A-B grades; only one student dropped out.

76. The standard of work of the current Year 13 students is well above the national average. In lessons, the students showed good knowledge and understanding of: the transmission of nervous impulses; agents which affect transmission at synapses; and also of mitosis and meiosis. The students worked at a good pace, showing good ability to work independently and producing some very good written work. Fieldwork reports are of high quality.

77. In Year 12, the students are attaining standards at least as high as expected. They are successfully tackling the demands of the AS-level work. In one lesson, the students gained good knowledge about the importance of cereal crops and how in maize the biochemical photosynthetic pathway is adapted to suit a particular environment. In another lesson, the students showed a good understanding of DNA replication and aspects of genetic modification. Their files are well presented and include good quality notes and essays.

78. The teaching is very good. The teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and of examination requirements. They are enthusiastic and expect high standards. The students respond positively; they work with keen interest and at a good pace. The teachers skilfully question students, encouraging them to think through ideas for themselves and to consolidate their learning. They provide good written resources and much very useful information to back up teaching, including exemplar answers to questions and detailed mark schemes. They give effective guidance to help students write good quality notes. The students say that teachers are very willing to give them personal help when they need it.

79. The students' attitudes to their work are very good. They are attentive and sustain good concentration. They are hard working, committed to achieving their target grades, and show much interest in biology and its wider applications in everyday life. They have good relationships with their teachers and each other.

80. They are successfully learning to work independently. They confidently carry out research using printed resources and databases and write good quality notes. With appropriate guidance from teachers, they competently plan their investigative work, and write well-focused essays.

81. Students are set structured essays, numerous practice examination questions, open-ended investigative work and research on particular topics. The teachers mark much of this work, pointing out strengths and weaknesses in essays, correcting mistakes, giving advice on how to improve, and giving appropriate praise. Coursework is marked and moderated rigorously. The students are appreciative of the teachers' written and oral feedback. They know their target grade for external examinations, their current attainment and how they might improve.

82. The subject is well managed by the principal biology teacher. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The department is committed to high standards and is well organised. The teachers set challenging targets for performance at AS and A2 levels, they closely monitor students' progress and they quickly identify any underachievers and intervene appropriately. However, the department does not monitor achievement against national value-added data standards. Accommodation is good. Resources are good except for ICT: there are no computers in the Sixth Form laboratory.

Chemistry

Overall, the quality of provision in chemistry is **good**.

Strengths

- Standards are well above average.
- The students are well motivated and focused on their work; they work hard, persevere and have a very positive attitude.
- The quality of teaching is good.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT to support the students' learning.
- The use of value-added measures in monitoring the department's work.

83. The results in GCE A-level are well above average. The subject is popular, with 33 students in Year 13 in 2001. Of these, 57 per cent achieved grade A or B. No student achieved less than an E. Standards have been consistently high over the last four years and have been maintained as the numbers entered have increased considerably. Both boys and girls exceed the national average for their respective gender and girls do better than the boys. Standards at AS-level are consistent with the high standards of the A-level results and are very good. Comparison with provisional national statistics shows the school to be well above the national average with approximately 65 per cent achieving A or B grades. Of those starting the Sixth Form chemistry courses, approximately 90 per cent stay to be entered for the examinations. Most of those leaving do so in the first year to take up other Sixth Form courses. The results at both A-level and AS-level represent good achievement, given the students' performance in GCSE.

84. Standards of work seen in class and in the students' files match the good results of previous years and are well above average. The majority of students show a good understanding of the work they are engaged in and can explain the underlying processes well. For instance, students in one class were able to explain the relationship between the size of the atomic radii of elements in Group 2 of the Periodic table and their position in that

group. Year 12 students in another class were able to give good explanations for redox reactions with ethanol. From their work and their own comments, it is evident that a great deal of new material is being covered quickly, in depth and with understanding. Year 12 students have clearly progressed a long way since their GCSE examinations seven months ago. Almost all are making good progress; their achievement relative to their prior high attainment at GCSE is good.

85. The students' attitude to their work is very good. The majority are highly motivated. Where they have difficulty they feel confident in asking their teachers for help and this is freely given. They work well and supportively together and lessons have a seminar-like feel to them. The students are developing their scientific research and investigation skills well. The one weakness in their learning is that they have insufficient opportunities to apply their skills in ICT.

86. The teaching is good overall and occasionally excellent. The teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and of examination requirements. Their planning ensures that all the work reflects the relevant syllabuses well. Expectations are high and the teachers back this with good monitoring and support. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and the teachers know their students well. The teachers make good use of day-to-day assessment to monitor individual students' progress: marking is detailed and informative. Good comments are given both orally and in writing. The teaching encourages very good responses from the students. Their attitudes and behaviour, coupled with their obvious motivation for success, help them to make good progress. Students are left in no doubt about how well they are progressing and how their teacher thinks they are doing relative to their capabilities. In a minority of lessons, otherwise good teaching is rendered less effective by an excessive emphasis on providing notes to be copied from the board, and a lack of support for the students' development of their own thinking skills.

87. The subject is well led and managed in day-to-day matters by the current staff and is well supported by the head of faculty. Improvement since the last inspection is good. There is a strong focus on good teaching and on high expectations. A relative weakness is that more use could be made of value-added information in order to judge the overall effectiveness and success of the subject.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

88. The focus was on the art textiles course at AS and A-level, but product design was also sampled at AS-level. In design and technology, examination results were average in 2001 with students doing as expected considering their GCSE results. The lesson seen was very good with some well researched, designed and manufactured products as, for example, a top lighter for a living room and an audio housing system. In these projects, ICT is used well for presentation, analysis of data and graphical processes.

Textiles

Overall, the quality of provision in art textiles is **good**.

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning.
- The pupils' achievement in designing and making.
- The standard of personal studies in Year 13.
- Leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- Standards of observational drawing.
- Accommodation.
- Links with art.

89. The GCE A-level examination results in 2001 were average. All students who took the examination gained a pass grade and the proportion gaining the higher A-B grades was well below average. This is a new course, started in the school in 2000 as a result of popular demand. It has attracted an all-female intake. In 2001, girls achieved similarly to their performance in other school subjects. In relation to their GCSE results, they did less well than expected. Once embarked on their courses, the students' continuation rates are good.

90. The standard of work of the current Year 13 students is considerably better. It is above average in the special studies seen based on corsetry, the use of quilting in clothing and body adornment. Three students are well on track to get the higher A-B grades. Students all entered the course with at least a C grade at GCSE and have made at least satisfactory and, in some cases, good progress during the course. Currently students are better at research, fine machine and hand embroidery than free experimental studies or observational drawing.

91. Students in Year 12 are not achieving as well as those in Year 13. There is a big gap between the highest attainer and the rest of the group. The higher attainer's work is good in all aspects and her decorative studies based on a cityscape are particularly effective, being well supported by annotated text. Middle and lower attainers have produced weak natural form studies for which their drawing is often poor. Quantity rather than quality are features of these girls' work at present. Nevertheless, considering their GCSE performance, their achievement is satisfactory.

92. The teaching is always good. Between them, teachers have good knowledge and understanding of traditional and also more experimental approaches to textile design. One teacher with an art textiles background introduces new ideas by the great names in the fashion industry. She inspires students with the visual resources provided whilst another, although traditionally trained, encourages a more risk-taking approach which opens up new possibilities, as in, for example, a project on angels. They make a good team who plan well, challenge students and use assessment procedures effectively to support progress and achievement. Assessment criteria are shared regularly with the students who benefit from these formative experiences, not only by being told how to improve but actually seeing the pattern of grades and teacher evaluations recorded for each project undertaken. By looking at these records, Year 12 students can see how their attainment in the natural form project has been lower than their study of cityscapes. Lack of ability to draw from natural forms, however, seems to have been too readily accepted by both teachers and students. Weakness in art provision from earlier years of study is currently having a negative effect on

the students' design capabilities within the art textiles course and measures are not being provided to remedy this situation.

93. Students enjoy the course and are very enthusiastic in their praise for their teachers. They have benefited from the organised trips to places such as the Bath Museum and the Clothes Show. They do find one of the two rooms available to them too small, particularly on those occasions when both Years 12 and 13 are timetabled together. Even when only one year group is using the room it is too cramped and has a negative effect on progress, as students struggle to share the working space available to them.

94. Much of the written work demanded of students takes the form of annotated notes. In Year 12, the standard of handwriting varies considerably. Some evidence of poor spelling and of the use of lower case letters where capitals were required was also noted in the written work studied. Year 13 students use computers well for research and to present their work. A computerised sewing machine is available and used competently by students. Standards of hand and machine sewing are above average.

95. Students are attentive, work hard and rise well to the challenges offered to them. Relationships are very good. A German student, attending the school for a short period of time in order to improve her language, is currently benefiting from help provided by the other students as she acquires new craft skills.

96. The good teaching and learning result from work in the course being well led and managed. Improvement since the last inspection is good overall. There is a commitment to improvement and recognition of what is still to be achieved. A good start has been made. Remedial teaching of drawing from natural forms, abstracting ideas and reformulating them in new ways, will need to be undertaken in order to limit the effects of weaknesses emerging from earlier experiences in art.

BUSINESS

97. The focus of the inspection was on the advanced business courses and the intermediate vocational business course; but economics was also sampled. In economics the GCE A-level results in 2001 were average and not as high as in the previous year. In the new AS examinations all 15 students passed and over two thirds gained the highest two grades. In the A-level economics lesson observed, the teaching was good and the students were making good progress in their understanding of taxation and government spending.

Business

Overall, the quality of provision in business education is **very good**.

Strengths

- Over recent years students of all capabilities have made very good progress in their learning.
- The teachers have very good subject knowledge.
- The introduction of new courses has been very well planned.
- There is a clear sense of purpose and direction for the department which comes from strong leadership.
- The students show a strong sense of commitment and purpose in their studies.

Areas for improvement

- The teachers need to give more written indication to the students on how they might improve the quality of their work.
- The use of external business links as a resource both for student learning and for staff development.

98. **GCE A-level business studies** has been an increasingly popular option over the past three years. The results have been significantly above average although there was a slight decrease in the top grades last summer. Girls outperformed boys at the highest grade but there was no marked difference between girls' and boys' performance otherwise. The students attained significantly better grades than in their other A-level subjects and their overall achievement compared very favourably with most local schools offering the same programme. All of the students who sat the first AS business studies examination in 2001 passed; a third gained the two highest grades. Most of these students are achieving well, taking into consideration their overall GCSE performance. Once embarked on their AS or A2 courses, few drop out.

99. The standards reached by current A-level students, as seen in lessons and their written work, are above average for both boys and girls. When account is taken of the students' GCSE grades at the start of the course, this represents very good achievement. The students understand economic concepts well and most can use subject terminology effectively in context. Their work is well organised in their files. A significant number of students are developing the analytical skills needed to attain higher grades. They are developing good skills of evaluation. An example was seen in an assignment where they considered the potential conflicts between a company's public image, its social obligations and shareholders' interests. However, a relatively small number of students still analyse work at a superficial level and are occasionally sidetracked into irrelevant issues. Even when the research work of these lower attainers is good, it remains largely uncritical of the data.

100. The progress made by the current AS students is also very good and their standards of attainment are slightly better than those of the previous year at this stage of the course. The vast majority have a secure understanding of marketing terminology and approaches; of different forms of business and their relative strengths and weaknesses; and of supply and demand theory. There is much evidence in their work of the appropriate application of business terminology to real world business examples. For instance, in one lesson the students produced a range of relevant examples to illustrate the concept of marketing niches and elements of the segmentation process. The most able students are making very good progress in developing a more analytical and evaluative approach to their work, as was evident in work on the marketing mix. A small minority of students still find it difficult to move beyond relatively superficial explanation of issues in the business world. For instance, while

their work showed they recognised the importance of cash flow, they needed a great deal of help to interpret cash flow forecasts.

101. This is the first year in which **the new advanced vocational course (AVCE)** is to be examined. There are significantly less students than in the A-level and AS programmes. On the predecessor to AVCE, the advanced GNVQ course, student recruitment was relatively low but the students' attainment was well above average. Their achievement, in the light of their GCSE results, was good. The grades achieved were particularly high in 2000 and over a period of four years, four out of every five students have gained distinction or merit grades. There was no significant difference overall between the grades for boys and girls.

102. The standards of current students in Year 13 are slightly above average and their achievement in the light of their previous GCSE grades is good. The strength of the students' work lies in their steady accumulation of knowledge and their understanding of the subject matter. They apply data well and use specific terminology effectively, such as in considering future business trends and opportunities. However, even some of the more able students experience difficulties with analysis and interpretation of information. For instance, some reports on local business organisations were well researched but the outcomes were not so well analysed. Most students experience some difficulties in writing with clarity and to the point. For example, in one lesson, a well-informed discussion of the impact of different advertising media was followed by some uncertain and patchy written coverage by most of the students. The overall ability level of Year 12 students is currently higher than their predecessors, who are now in Year 13. The most able students are making very good progress in developing their evaluative skills, as seen in work on business objectives and management approaches. Virtually all students can understand the topics they have studied and carry out effective independent research. Overall, the students' achievement in Year 12 is very good relative to their previous GCSE results.

103. On **the Intermediate GNVQ** course, all students have achieved a pass grade in the past two years with over half gaining merit grades last year. The average number of students on the course was ten in those years. The current number is seven. Of the current students, two generally produce work of a merit grade standard and the remainder are working at pass grade level. This represents good progress in the light of their GCSE grades, and very good progress for two with particular learning difficulties. The students know and understand the criteria that define the various industrial sectors and recognise the importance of business legislation. Most can use both textbooks and the Internet effectively to gain information for their assignments. Good use was made of *Powerpoint* in one lesson to present information on the impact of national legislation. Whilst the most able students reflect on the wider implications of what they are studying, the majority periodically experience difficulties in selecting and using relevant data and information to illustrate their work.

104. Overall the quality of teaching across the business courses is very good. In virtually all the lessons seen, students worked with a very high level of interest and commitment and there was a purposeful partnership between them and their teachers. The main strengths that teachers bring to lessons include expert subject knowledge, planning that links course criteria to case studies from the business world and a range of different teaching approaches that maintain the pace of learning and retain student interest. In addition, the capacity to support individual students' learning within a whole class situation, accurate marking of work to subject criteria; and an insistence that students reflect on their learning are also features of the effective teaching. The students, when interviewed, strongly emphasised the high regard in which they held their teachers both for their academic expertise and personal interest in their progress. A good example of several teaching strengths was seen in a Year 12 AVCE lesson where the students revised taxation in paired discussions, fed back the key points to

the whole class and responded to questions from both the teacher and their fellow students. They followed this with individual research on the Internet into the impact of tax changes, using the latest Treasury information. Throughout the lesson, the teacher gave good support and feedback to students. Very good lesson planning thus enabled the students to move forward at a brisk pace and retained their interest by giving them considerable responsibility in the process. A number of lessons would, however, have benefited from allowing students more time to reflect upon questions and from targeting more questions at the most able students to help them clarify their ideas. Also, although work is marked promptly and accurately, more guidance could be given to students on how they might improve.

105. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The high standards have been maintained over recent years due to a strong sense of direction in long-term planning as seen in the introduction of the new AVCE and AS-level courses. The department analyses, in some detail, the progress of its students and takes account of that analysis in setting up future provision. There are ambitious but realistic targets for improvement. The individual members of the department team work as a cohesive unit to improve practice and provision further. The professional development undertaken by the teachers is closely related to the demands of the new examinations but it has also helped them develop broader skills as teachers and subject managers. Valuable subject expertise would, however, come from a programme of placements with local businesses. There are good ICT facilities to support independent study in the business studies rooms and a good range of appropriate texts and computer software to support individual study.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

106. The school does not offer examination courses in information and communication technology in its Sixth Form.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

107. Within this curriculum area, sport studies and leisure and recreation were sampled. The A-level results in sports studies in 2001 were well above average, as they have been in three of the last four years. Many of the students performed better than expected given their overall GCSE performance. Two lessons were observed. Both were at least good. In one, very good teaching skilfully related theories of arousal and anxiety to performance in sport. Challenging questioning helped the students to a very good understanding of different techniques of psychological preparation.

108. This is the first year of the new leisure and recreation vocational A-level (AVCE). Previous performance in advanced GNVQ leisure and tourism has been above average for distinction and merit grades. The number of students opting for the programme has been low, however; currently there are four students taking the course. In the lesson observed the teaching was good but the students' progress was no more than satisfactory.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Overall, the quality of provision in health and social care is **good**.

Strengths

- The achievement of the students is good relative to their previous attainment at GCSE and there is good progression on to higher education courses.
- The teaching is good overall; lessons are effective and well planned.
- Very effective support is given to individual students, both academically and pastorally.
- There is strong leadership of the subject.

Areas for improvement

- The teaching approaches are insufficiently varied and there are limited opportunities for students to develop skills of analysis and evaluation.
- Opportunities for learning through links to services in the community are limited, and students do not have sufficient opportunities to relate work practice to what they are learning in school.

109. In the last three years, results in advanced GNVQ have been well above average, with all students gaining a pass grade and well over half gaining distinction level. This represents good progress in the light of the students' previous GCSE results. Many students have moved on to higher education programmes related to occupations in the health and social care sector and, more broadly, into teaching.

110. There are currently three students in Year 13 studying on the course, and six students in Year 12. In Year 13, all students have a sound level of knowledge and understanding of provision in the vocational sector and of the fundamental concepts of health and social care. They produce well-researched assignments, based on interviews with clients and derived from their placements. The work in their portfolios is both thorough and well presented. The most able student can synthesise information well and is capable of very sound analysis and evaluation of information and data. The others produce work of a more variable quality and their overall evaluations lack precision or depth. For instance, there was some effective work on communication strategies in their placements but they produced little detail to give an opinion of their impact and effectiveness. In terms of their previous GCSE grades, all the students have made good progress over the course.

111. In Year 12, the standards of work are generally higher. Most of the students have a good knowledge and understanding of the topics covered. They are able to reflect upon their experiences on placement and to analyse what was effective and less effective. The most able students produce assignments in which they are beginning to reflect on how effectively they have worked and to recommend strategies that might be tried in the future, such as in care of the elderly. In the lesson observed, the students were introduced to the principles of symbolic communication. In group discussion they were able to identify and talk confidently about the relative strengths and shortcomings of forms of communication used on their placement before relating the new ideas they had learned effectively to activities they had designed for their placements. In terms of their previous GCSE grades, virtually all the students have made good progress on the course and the achievement of two students has been very good.

112. The teaching is good overall. The teachers' particular strengths include: very good knowledge of the subject; a methodical approach to planning; and their capacity to relate the theory and practice of health and social care so that the students gain a realistic insight into the demands of the sector. Assessment, too, is continuous and accurately reflects the

subject criteria. Nearly all the teachers give students clear guidance on how they might improve their work. The students benefit from the way they are taught and the strong sense of commitment that staff bring to their teaching. The students commented very favourably on the supportive environment for learning in health and social care. They appreciate the opportunities they have for independent study and the sustained and positive advice and guidance they receive as individual learners which they feel gives them much greater confidence. The impact of that support and the interest generated was evident in much of the assignment work which was thoroughly covered and well presented. The students are developing the confidence to use increasingly sophisticated research methods. In the lessons seen, the students made a very positive and sustained commitment to their work. Teaching approaches would, however, be further enhanced by a greater variety of tasks, most particularly case studies to help the students to practise their skills of critical analysis more regularly.

113. The leadership and management of health and social care are good. The team has a clear sense of direction and purpose. Approaches to organising and teaching the programme are well co-ordinated. Assessment across the department accurately matches the course criteria and the scheme of work ensures comprehensive coverage of the units taught. The resources used are appropriate and are sufficient. Most, if not all, teachers give students appropriate guidance on how they might improve their work. The range of learning opportunities would, however, be enhanced by more extensive use of links to local services in the health and social care sector. The small numbers of students recruited to the programme necessarily limit the sharing of learning experiences and the capacity for group work.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

114. The focus was on art and design, but drama, media studies and photography were also sampled. The A-level results in drama were average in 2001 and the students did not do as well as expected given their overall performance at GCSE. One lesson in drama was seen: very good teaching, including challenging questioning, enabled the students to understand the likely impact of their ideas on an audience. In media studies, the results were well above average. In the media studies lesson seen, good teaching, including effective focus on media language, helped the students to a good understanding of subtle devices used for impact. In photography, the results were below average and no student attained the higher grades. The teaching in the lesson seen was satisfactory. In music, which was not sampled, the small number of students involved performed very well in the A-level examination.

Art and design

Overall, the quality of provision in art is **poor**.

Strengths

- The teachers have good subject knowledge and understanding.
- The students' skills in life drawing classes are good.

Areas for improvement

- Standards are well below average.
- Written work in journals is well below average.
- The leadership and management are unsatisfactory at the level of planning, monitoring and assessment.
- Accommodation and resources are inadequate for students' needs.

115. The GCE A-level examination results in 2001 showed a significant drop in performance over the previous year and were well below average. Not all students who took the examination gained a pass grade and the proportion gaining the higher A-B grades was well below average. Both male and female students significantly underachieved when compared to their other subjects. In relation to their GCSE results students did less well than expected. The proportion of students not continuing from the AS course in Year 12 to the A2 course in Year 13 is greater than in most other subjects.

116. The standards of work of current Year 13 students are also well below average. In the lessons seen, for this year group, the majority of students do not achieve as well as might be expected. Whilst one gifted and talented student is well placed to gain the highest grade, with good journal entries and strong graphic design, others did not get the school's required GCSE entry grade for an A-level course and are struggling to meet course requirements. Students admit finding the adjustment from GCSE to A-level a strain and as a result made slow progress at AS-level.

117. Students in Year 12 are achieving better than Year 13. The work is more structured for their needs, and giving the whole group a common starting point ensures that students can support one another after the formal lesson has ended. Shared knowledge and understanding of what is required of them leads to good levels of discussion. The weakest attainment in this year group is in the written entries in journals. The lack of technical language, together with simplistic sentence construction, detracts from the visual imagery, which is often of a much higher standard.

118. Teaching over time, as evident in the standards gained by students and the progress made in folders and journals, is unsatisfactory. During the inspection, however, the teaching seen was satisfactory overall and was good in the Year 12 lessons. The strengths are in the teachers' subject knowledge and understanding and the enthusiasm and commitment shown to students in their care. Weaknesses are evident, however, at the level of planning, strategies used and assessment. From the scrutiny of work and from talking to students, these weaknesses in teaching have limited the students' development and led to unsatisfactory understanding of their own learning. Too much reliance on secondary resources from books or photographs has suppressed the students' ability to abstract and synthesise ideas directly from nature. Where students are able to draw from direct observation, as in the life class, their understanding improves and achievement in these elements is good. A number of students have better knowledge and understanding of artists' styles than the skill to implement ideas into practice or write about what they have done. This is because they regularly have in-depth individual conversations with teachers about artists but see little visual demonstration either of techniques in art or models of writing. The teachers do not act as role models, in Sixth Form lessons, by keeping journals themselves. One Year 12 student recognised her writing needs but the teacher interpreted her request too simplistically by offering to supply a word list rather than model the writing process or suggest where students could see professional artists' journals.

119. Students admit they do not know their predicted grades within art although they do understand the criteria they are aiming for. One boy with good ideas was disadvantaged by the poor ICT facilities available for his photographic needs and this limited his development of animation. A girl had nowhere to display her work in progress or reflect on what had been achieved. As a result her progress was slow in her study of the human figure. Cramped conditions and inadequate storage facilities limit all students' ability to work on a large scale.

120. The leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory. Weaknesses in teaching and standards are not being addressed rigorously enough. The schools' unsatisfactory attempts to procure better accommodation for art has led to lack of vision of

what can nevertheless be achieved. Unsatisfactory progress has been made since the previous inspection. Displays throughout the department vary from satisfactory to poor but in public spaces within the school provision for display is very poor. Monitoring of teaching and learning within art has not been regularly carried out and as a result teachers' expectations and practices vary considerably. There is very limited technical help. ICT resources are inadequate and underused. Sixth form students have no dedicated space where they can work or leave work in progress. All art rooms are used for tutorial purposes outside of lesson times and as a result students fear damage to their work. The art accommodation is very poor overall. It is dirty and cramped with torn floor covering presenting a health and safety concern. The dark room is a good and well-used facility.

HUMANITIES

121. The focus was on geography, history, sociology and psychology but religious education was also sampled. In religious education, too few students followed the course to allow for secure statistical comparison. In the one lesson seen the teaching was very good. The teacher's challenging questioning helped the students to deepen their understanding of Theravada Buddhism. One very able girl made valid connections across religions that existed at the time.

Geography

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- The higher attaining students produce good quality coursework following visits to a field study centre.
- The quality of the students' presentation of data.
- The teachers' knowledge of the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Further improvement in examination results.
- Advice to lower attaining students on how to improve their written work.
- Monitoring of the students' progress and making better use of data to do so.

122. The results in GCE A-level were below the national average in 2001 and many students did not perform as well as expected, considering their GCSE results. Girls performed better than boys. In 2001, at AS-level, virtually all the students achieved at least a pass grade and nearly half achieved grades A or B.

123. The attainment of the students currently in Years 12 and 13 is average. Given their performance at GCSE most are achieving satisfactorily.

124. The students in Year 12 have sound levels of knowledge and understanding in their study of coastlines. Higher attaining students can explain the effects of physical processes on human activities and write extended essays with detailed examples of human and physical features. Students of average ability can give straightforward descriptions and explanations of geographical features and processes but their answers to questions sometimes lack detail. Lower attaining students also find it difficult to relate their knowledge to the new situations posed by examination questions. Many students use a good range of techniques presenting data and offer a sound analysis of the topics being studied. Students in Year 13 have produced good coursework, including accounts of their fieldwork visit, some of which are of a high standard. The lower attaining students complete sound sets of notes

incorporating diagrams and graphs. Many pupils have acquired a sound understanding of environmental issues such as deforestation and ecosystems. More able students in Year 13 identify issues and use a wide range of sources, including the Internet. Very few students drop out of their AS or A2 courses once started.

125. Overall, teaching is satisfactory. In the best lessons, the aims are closely related to the requirements of the examination and the teacher models good practice for the pupils. The students are challenged by activities that require them to transform the information in some way, rather than simply copy or make notes. The teachers have good knowledge of the subject and of what is and is not required in examination answers. Students in these lessons offer more answers and ask more questions. In one very good lesson, the students and the teacher engaged in a very mature discussion about the role of trans-national companies in developing countries. Where the teaching is satisfactory overall, some teachers do not challenge the more able students sufficiently and time is sometimes wasted on rather low-level tasks. In some cases, lower ability students need more help in improving their written work. Relationships between teachers and students are invariably good. Students value the support that their teachers give in helping them to complete their coursework. The students' response in lessons is good. The vast majority listen attentively and work conscientiously.

126. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory although there are some weaknesses. For example, there is still no clear system of target setting or of tracking the students' progress. Improvements have, however, been made in the planning of work and in the consistency of assessment. Standards are improving and the new team of teachers is developing a wider range of teaching styles. The department needs to continue its focus on raising standards and to monitor progress more closely.

History

Overall, the quality of provision in history is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- The subject knowledge of the teachers.
- The attitudes of the students towards the subject.

Areas for improvement

- The range of teaching methods.
- The use of prior attainment data to aid teaching and learning.
- The use of different texts so that students become more aware of different historical interpretations.
- Monitoring of the teaching within the department.

127. Results at A-level in 2001 were disappointing. Eighty-two per cent of the students gained grades A-E, which is below the national average and only 18 per cent attained A or B grades. Results over the past two years have shown a falling trend. Twenty-five per cent of all the girls who took the examination failed to obtain a grade and even at the higher grades girls' performance declined. Conversely, results in the coursework component of the examination have been good. Results in the AS examination taken for the first time in 2001 were also disappointing, especially in the module relating to Russian history. In terms of their prior attainment, the achievement for many pupils was unsatisfactory at both A and AS-level. Once they start their AS or A2 courses, few drop out. However, the proportion not continuing from Year 12 into Year 13 is higher than in most other subjects.

128. Observation of lessons and analysis of students' work in the present Year 12 indicate that standards are beginning to rise. The students are benefiting from better planning and co-ordination of the AS-level courses. In Year 13, the coursework sampled indicates a good level of attainment by more able students, although the work of weaker students shows that their skills in analysis and evaluation are not well developed.

129. Most students are able to use historical terminology to explain causes and effects of key events in the periods studied. For example, in a Year 12 lesson on the economic effects of Hitler's policies, students talked of the underlying ideologies with confidence. In a Year 13 lesson on British foreign policy between the wars, they were able to offer a number of convincing explanations for the support for appeasement. They are less confident when asked to discuss and analyse different historical interpretations, assess the importance of events or movements or critically evaluate sources. The written work of lower attaining students is focused on 'telling the story' rather than on analysis. Their use of ICT remains underdeveloped and there is too heavy a reliance upon a small number of texts for information.

130. The teachers' subject knowledge is good. Nonetheless, the teaching could be improved by the use of a greater variety of methods. The lessons seen during the inspection were broadly satisfactory. However, weaknesses in teaching over time have been a contributory factor to the unsatisfactory results. There is little evidence of students working in pairs, making presentations or entering into debates for and against a viewpoint. Students' learning would benefit from a less heavy dependence upon question and answer sessions and textbook exercises. A greater focus on developing a broad range of study skills would support and extend their learning. Not all lessons have clearly stated objectives and this can lead to students being unsure as to the focus of the lesson. Marking is mainly thorough and appropriate advice is given on how to improve skills. Weaker students in Year 12 have been given advice on how to structure essays.

131. The vast majority of the students clearly enjoy their history. Their attitude to the subject is good and they want to learn. They are generally well motivated and co-operate well with each other, sharing resources and listening respectfully to each other's opinions. Most students enjoy good relationships with the staff and are quite prepared to ask if uncertain and to volunteer their opinions. Most students do the work set for independent study and come fully prepared to the lessons although occasionally a few students have not completed the required reading and are unable to contribute effectively.

132. There are weaknesses in the leadership of the subject. There is insufficient analysis of data on pupils' performance to enable the teachers to tailor the teaching to the needs of all abilities. The provision of resources is too narrow and the monitoring of the leadership needs to be more rigorous.

Sociology

Overall, the quality of provision in sociology is **good**.

Strengths

- Well above average results.
- Good teaching.
- Good assessment procedures.
- The students are highly motivated.

Areas for improvement

- Consistency in the quality written feedback to students.
- The use of value-added data to set targets for students and to monitor their progress.

133. The results in the GCE A-level examination in 2001 were well above average. They have been well above average in each of the last few years. The results in the first of the new AS examinations in summer 2001 were equally well above average. Most of the students perform better than expected, considering their overall GCSE results.

134. The standard of work seen during the inspection was also well above average. For example, Year 12 students, discussing the role of education in determining social roles, showed a very good level of understanding of terms such as hegemonic masculinity. The Year 13 group showed very good understanding in discussing differing perspectives and theoretical interpretations of gender and inequality. The Year 12 students demonstrate good levels of knowledge and understanding of topics with some skills of analysis and evaluation. The work of the Year 13 students contains much more evidence of skills of evaluation and analysis. For example, an essay on the family, written by a Year 13 student, included a very good evaluation of the assumptions on which models of the family are based.

135. The attitudes and the behaviour of students are excellent. They are attentive and highly motivated, and contribute willingly and enthusiastically to class discussions and in response to questions. They work well together and individually. They enjoy very good relationships with teachers, lessons are good humoured, and students are prepared to question the teachers to further develop their understanding.

136. The quality of teaching is good. All the teaching seen was at least good. A good variety of methods is used in lessons and the teachers make very good use of current examples, to which the students can relate, in order to illustrate concepts and issues. In a Year 12 lesson, pictures of people currently featuring in the media, for example Jane Couch the female boxer, were used effectively to develop further understanding of the concepts of masculinity and femininity. Good progress is made in the majority of lessons. In a lesson on youth and culture, very good progress was made from the initial description of a study to the development of a good understanding by all students of a number of sociological concepts and of the positive and negative effects of education in determining social roles. The teachers provide high quality support to students, both in the classroom and outside, which contributes to the effectiveness of their learning. This is demonstrated by the very high retention of students from AS to A-level. The teachers monitor student progress using the marks which students gain in essays and tests but they do not set students specific targets for improvement or use value-added data to set targets formally or monitor progress. Very good quality homework is set regularly. Essays are based on examination questions and are marked against the criteria specified by the examination board. There is, however, some variability in the detail and quality of written feedback on student work; it is not always as constructive as it could be. For example, "36/60, good attempt" is insufficient to tell the

student what needs to be done to improve the work. Written feedback is, however, often supplemented by good oral feedback given in class.

137. The subject is well led and managed and the teachers collaborate closely. Professional development has focused appropriately on the new examinations. Resources are very good, with all students having a textbook to take home and access to a variety of other texts, both in the classroom and in the learning resources centre.

Psychology

Overall, the quality of provision in psychology is **very good**.

Strengths

- The students' well above average attainment.
- Very good teaching.
- Very good assessment.
- The students are highly motivated.
- Very good leadership and management.

Area for improvement

- The use of value-added information to set targets and judge progress.

138. Results are well above average in GCE A-level. The results in the first AS examinations in summer 2001 were also well above average. The students achieve significantly higher grades than would be expected from their GCSE results.

139. The standards of the students currently in Year 12 and Year 13 are equally well above average. The students in Year 13 have extended their knowledge and understanding and have very good skills of application, evaluation and analysis. This is based on a firm foundation of knowledge and understanding and on the skills of evaluation and analysis developed in Year 12. The students in Year 12 show a good understanding of the relationship between stress and personality, as demonstrated in an exercise which involved the analysis of the cultural differences in the perception of, and coping with, stress. A Year 13 group discussed the development of aggression very knowledgeably. Students working on a small group task to design a study in which the development of aggression could be examined, analysed all the factors that would need to be taken into account including operational, ethical and situational factors. The best examples of coursework by Year 13 students include a detailed evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the design and procedures used in carrying out a psychological investigation and a thorough justification of the choice of the statistical test used to analyse the data that has been collected.

140. The students are attentive, highly motivated and articulate and contribute willingly and enthusiastically to class discussions and in response to questions. They enjoy very good relationships with their teachers. They work industriously together and individually. The behaviour is excellent.

141. The quality of teaching in all lessons is very good. The teachers have a good command of the subject and make skilful use of a range of methods in order to maintain the students' interest and concentration. In a Year 12 lesson focusing on theories of maternal deprivation, points from a video viewed in the previous lesson were skilfully developed through question and answer and the use of a variety of case studies. Much reference was also made to previous learning and the application of concepts from different areas of psychology to the topic, for example, operant conditioning, language development and methods of research. This helped the students to bring together aspects of their learning

from different parts of the course. The students make good progress in lessons. In a lesson on attention, work done by the students as homework was built upon by requiring the students to work together and use Treisman's Attenuation Model as the basis for criticisms of Broadbent's filter theory. The students are regularly challenged to evaluate theories, models, studies and concepts, thus helping them to develop the skills of evaluation and analysis needed for the higher examination grades. The teachers provide high quality support to students, both in the classroom and outside, which contributes to the effectiveness of the learning process. Extra lessons are offered to A-level students who are retaking AS modules. Teachers monitor student progress using the marks which students gain in essays and tests to judge progress or lack of it. However, they do not set students specific targets for improvement or use value-added data to formally set targets and monitor progress. Written feedback is detailed and constructive, indicating how the work can be improved. The students are required to resubmit any work in which they have not demonstrated a good level of knowledge, understanding, evaluation and analysis. Model answers to essay questions are also discussed in lessons and this forms part of the feedback process.

142. The subject is very well managed. The teachers collaborate closely over teaching and assessment. Resources are good, with all students having a textbook to take home and access to a variety of other texts, both in the classroom and in the learning resources centre. A member of the psychology staff has developed a psychology website to support the students' learning, including, for example, model essays.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

143. The focus was on English (both language and literature) and French. German and Spanish were also sampled. In the GCE A Level examinations in both German and Spanish in 2001, too few students were entered to allow for secure statistical comparisons to be made. However, in neither subject did the students do as well as expected, given their GCSE results. Two lessons were observed, one in German and one in Spanish. In the German lesson, the teaching satisfactorily developed the students' listening and reading skills. In the Spanish lesson, good teaching enabled the students to respond confidently and with a good level of accuracy when discussing immigration issues in Spain. Performance in the recent AS examinations (summer 2001) shows definite improvement in standards in both languages, with almost all students progressing satisfactorily.

Overall, the quality of provision in English is **good**. For English language it is **very good**.

Strengths

- The consistently well above average standards in English language and its growing popularity.
- Good quality teaching, with many very good aspects.
- The quality of assessment and feedback to students and its impact in improving their work.
- The students' willingness to take intellectual risks and debate ideas in lessons.

Areas for improvement

- Helping less capable students write coherently about literature at an earlier stage.
- Ensuring broader reading among all students.
- Improving the buildings' state of repair.

144. Above average standards have been achieved in GCE A-level examinations in English literature over the last three years and consistently well above average standards in English language. The small number of students who seek to improve their GCSE English grade also do well, with around two-thirds of them reaching the A*-C range. The prior attainment of the students taking advanced courses, that is, their GCSE results, are above average. The most significant improvement in grades is therefore to be found in English language, with the achievement of students studying literature closer to what might have been expected from their GCSE results. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls. Once embarked on their AS or A2 courses few drop out.

145. Current standards in the work seen broadly reflect this picture, though attainment in English literature was more clearly above average than in the 2001 A-level results. Practically all students can form a coherent line of argument and support this effectively with quotation, although this does take well into Year 13 for some. One Year 13 student described how this had only recently 'clicked' for him. Another weakness in Year 12 is the difficulty some less capable students have in finding the right language for critical appreciation or comparison. By contrast, able students develop an impressive sense of the meaning and context about the texts they study. A very good example of this was seen in the confidence with which some of the best comparative studies were handled, for example of Austen's 'Persuasion' with Forster's 'A Room with a View'. The difference between the stronger and weaker work was often linked to the student's knowledge of context and, therefore, breadth of reading.

146. Many students of both language and literature develop impressive research skills, capturing relevant articles and other material from the Internet. Language students achieve a great deal in their first year. They are conscious of the 'big step' they take in analysing language and acquiring theoretical perspectives on language acquisition. Their facility for the annotation of text is very well developed and their ability to see how a language works helps them in other subjects. Both language and literature students are committed to their work, stimulated by it and keen to do well. Most demonstrated a facility for proposing and defending their own ideas in lessons which helped develop their critical faculty; a few were less confident.

147. The teaching is very good in English language, and good in English literature. There are many very good techniques to encourage students to confront their own strengths and weaknesses and improve. These strengths are common also to teaching in drama and media studies. The teachers' very good subject knowledge allows them to construct lessons in which students learn rather than simply being told. In one literature lesson, for example, the teacher provided four examples of seventeenth century texts for students to identify, while in media studies the teacher asked what expectations of the film 'Brassed Off' could be inferred from one sentence on the poster. The students' successes in handling these challenging activities contributed both to their confidence and to their understanding.

148. Enquiry and self-assessment are encouraged by the teachers, the latter supported by the very good marking and comments on students' work. Students are given a very clear view on how they are doing and how to improve their grade. Particularly in language, partly due to the nature of the subject, teachers are able to provide a strong framework for success. Good relationships and the support provided for individual students are another strength, with individuals whose performance shows any falling off helped to get back on course. The encouragement and clear guidance that GCSE students receive also explain the success most of them enjoy despite their problems with accurate expression. The only weakness in teaching was some loss of pace in two of the hour-long lessons seen, but with little serious impact on learning.

149. The teachers' qualifications and experience are well matched to the courses they teach. The Sixth Form courses have been well supported by the school over time and are well resourced with, for example, books to support broader reading for specific periods. There is good access to the Internet and the school Intranet. Accommodation, though adequate in size, is rather scruffy, however, particularly outside the classrooms.

150. The leadership and management of English are good. The decision to introduce media studies and the growing popularity of the language course have broadened opportunities for students. Staff work well together as a team, one which effectively includes the head and deputy head of Sixth Form in monitoring and supporting individuals. Results are reviewed and planning adjusted accordingly, good ideas are shared and teachers moderate work to ensure accurate assessment.

French

Overall, the quality of provision in French is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- The improving standards of the students currently in Years 12 and 13.
- Almost all students are developing good listening skills.
- The students have positive attitudes to advanced study in a language and are well motivated.
- The teachers' competence in the languages they teach and their skill in teaching exclusively in the language itself.

Areas for improvement

- The students' accuracy in speaking and writing.
- Some of the marking is not as thorough as it could be and does not always give sufficient guidance on how to improve.
- Some students are relatively passive in class and are not brought into discussion as much as they could be.
- Use of data to judge performance and set targets for students.

151. The GCE A-level examination results last summer were below average and showed a continued downward trend from the above average results achieved three years previously. Considering their GCSE results, the students in 2001 did not do as well as they should have, but not significantly so. The proportion of students in 2001 achieving the highest grades, A and B, has been below average in the last three years; none did so in 2001. Girls have performed better than boys in the past three years. Indeed, relatively few boys have chosen to study French at A-level. Once they have started their A2 courses, very few do not continue to take the examination.

152. The standards of work of the current students have improved and are now slightly above average. This is evident both in their ongoing work and in their above average success in the recent AS examinations. Most are achieving as well as their GCSE performance indicates they should be. Almost all are developing good listening skills, actively promoted by their teachers' skill in conducting the lessons in French. Standards in the other three main skills, reading, speaking and writing, are satisfactory. Only the most able are confident and accurate in their speaking. In writing most are still 'stuck' in English sentence structures and lack confidence in using French idiom. However, recent coursework produced by the Year 13 students shows good to very good range of vocabulary and improving sentence structure. This work also shows good research skills, particularly through use of the Internet, for example on environmental and health issues. The students'

attitudes are positive. In class, they concentrate well and most participate keenly. Some, however, are relatively passive and are not pulled into the discussion as much as they could be. They persevere well when tasks are difficult, for example when tasked to decipher seven-digit numbers on tape.

153. The teaching and its impact on the students' learning are satisfactory overall, and some is good. General strengths include the teachers' competence in French and good relationships with the students, resulting in good development of listening skills and positive attitudes. In the better lessons, there is good attention to grammatical accuracy, including effective use of the whiteboard or overhead transparencies to emphasise key points. In these lessons, good pace and questioning ensures that the students get through a lot of work and that their intellectual effort is good. Weaknesses in otherwise sound lessons include not always bringing all the students into the discussion so that some get considerably less practice in speaking, and too many open questions, for example, "Qu'est-ce que tu penses de...?" before the students are reasonably equipped with at least some of the language they need in order to be able to respond confidently.

154. Some of the marking, for example of students' extended written work, is good, giving them clear alternatives where they have struggled to express a particular idea. This good marking also gives students a breakdown of how they have done, based on the examination criteria. Other marking of this type of work is more superficial, is not explicitly criteria based and does not give clear indications of how to improve.

155. Both the leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. For example, standards in writing have been appropriately identified as a key area for improvement. A good level of consistency has been achieved in teaching style, particularly, but not only, in relation to the use of French. There is a good balance of the four skills in lessons and follow-up work. Insufficient use, however, is made of value-added data to judge overall performance in the subject or to set targets for students. There is a need now to refine strategies to improve accuracy in both speaking and writing, for example by providing model essays and by a regular focus on relevant and appropriate idiom.